

REVOLUTION

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Bob Avakian: Two Talks on Preparations and Possibilities

- *Some Thoughts*
Fall/Winter 1987
- *Some Further Thoughts*
Early 1988

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"Some Thoughts" and "Some Further Thoughts" were two talks by Bob Avakian, Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA. They were given in late 1987 and early 1988. "Some Thoughts" was sent on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the crucial struggle within the RCP to condemn the revisionist coup in China and uphold Mao Tsetung's revolutionary line and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. Both talks have been edited by the author for publication.

Some Thoughts

Fall/Winter 1987

This is going to consist of three main parts: first of all, more on our analysis of the objective situation and the character of the decade; then more on doing our duty at home; and finally returning to the historical and international perspective.

I. Objective Situation, Character of the Decade

On this first point a number of the things I'm going to touch on are points that I've spoken to before, but maybe there will be some new angles on them here and also some new points. So to begin then: More on our analysis of the objective situation and the character of the decade.

As we've said before, we have to recognize that, in terms of the analysis that we made, going into this decade, of what the character of the decade would be, there has been some tactical underestimation of the difficulties for the other side in having the all-out confrontation which we have been correctly pointing to as shaping up. We have in the recent past made some self-criticism, internally among our leadership, for this tactical underestimation. We've also criticized ourselves more generally, including publicly in print — for example, in *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?* — for somewhat underestimating the destructiveness of such a war which would almost certainly involve nuclear weapons. Along with this we've stressed the need for emphasis on *prevention* of such a war through revolution. And I think all this does have tactical implications.

In other words, there are real difficulties for the imperialists that might in fact delay the initiation of the showdown. It might delay the actual confrontation — *insofar as*

they have a choice. Insofar as they have a choice and room left for maneuver, these tactical difficulties may be, and perhaps already have been, the occasion for some delay in actually initiating the showdown and getting it on face-to-face with a full-out confrontation. In a perverse way, in sort of a perverse twist of our own situation, they also have a difficulty with the question of Beginnings, because they recognize that once they do begin there's no turning back and that the situation is going to be an extremely difficult one to "manage," as they put it. The question of victory in some recognizable sense is going to be extremely difficult to achieve, and this does have, as I said, some tactical impact on the situation. Perhaps it already has had some concrete effect in delaying some things, in particular the all-out showdown.

On the one hand, it's important for us to recognize this and to be alert to the various ways in which they maneuver tactically as a result of these difficulties. On the other hand, and strategically, it's even more important, of course, that we remain firm on the correctness of the basic analysis we've made of the character of the decade and, more fundamentally, of the character of the underlying contradictions and the way they are playing themselves out. It's crucial to remain firm in our understanding of what has been and remains the principal contradiction in the world—the interimperialist contradiction—and at the same time to grasp this in dynamic terms and specifically in terms of the intensifying conflict between the two main trends in the world. These are the trend toward world war and the trend toward revolution—both of which have intensified through the course of this decade.

It seems to me that what we could say is that the analysis put forward in the interview "Questions for These Times" is in fundamental terms very much on the mark. It is correct in reaffirming and giving more specific characterization to the basic analysis of the decade and the contradictions that mark it—analyzing them specifically in terms of the situation as it has developed up to the middle and heading toward the second part of the decade. It is also correct in talking about the crucial fact that, as I alluded to before, in basic terms the imperialists are not in control of the situation—that they only have limited, and in an overall sense narrowing, room for maneuver.

In that interview—interestingly enough and still very much applicable now—the Middle East (and the Persian

Gulf in particular) and Central America, with Nicaragua as the pivotal point, were focused on as "hot spots" in the world. They were cited as scenarios, if you will, out of which the all-out confrontation could—after a certain point—inexorably develop. And I emphasize "after a certain point." It did say there—and it is correct to continue to recognize—that there is maneuvering room in these various situations, and that's also been shown. But certainly, to quote from the Joe King Carrasco song from a little while ago, "Current events are making me tense." In other words, if you look at the Persian Gulf and if you look at Central America—as well as some other places in the world, but especially those two places—there is certainly nothing that should cause people to say, "Oh well, what are these alarmists talking about, continually harping on the danger of contradictions exploding into all-out confrontation in world war and massive nuclear exchanges between the two imperialist blocs? How could they get an idea like that? What possible scenario could they envision that might lead to that?" Because, as I said, current events are certainly giving an exclamation point to the correctness of our fundamental analysis on this.

So, to sum this up, tactically there may have been (in our analysis at the start of this decade) some underestimation of the difficulties for them and therefore of the necessity for them to maneuver, insofar as they had room and had choice. And this went along with some tendency to underestimate the destructiveness that such a war would involve and the need for us to put even more emphasis on the question of preventing such a war, through revolution. But strategically, not only has our analysis of the character of the decade, and the contradictions that mark it and are underlying the unfolding of events, been shown to be correct, but these contradictions have been asserting themselves ever more forcefully through the course of the decade. They are very acutely asserting themselves in the present, immediate period.

So that's just by way of general review and overview on this question. To proceed from that, the point is that while the imperialists have tactical problems in terms of actually engaging in all-out war, and they do have some maneuvering room, they don't have all that much maneuvering room. And fundamentally, they are not in control of events. Further, to shift more for a moment to the "home front" so to speak, that is, the U.S.: In terms of the severity,

extent, and all-encompassing character of the repression that would be called forth by the intensification of these contradictions, if anything, it seems to me, coming into this decade we made an underestimation of that. Not that we didn't speak to it; we certainly did, and we've spoken increasingly to it. But I think that, if anything, we had an underestimation of it at the start of this decade.

Reversing Correct Verdicts

In one of my nonpublished correspondences, citing the example of the Cultural Revolution in China and the reversing of correct verdicts there, I made the analogy between that and the reversal of the "verdicts of the '60s" in the U.S. If you remember at the time of the coup in China, and then especially with Deng Xiaoping coming more and more clearly to the fore, very quickly and dramatically the reversals went on—actually they went on much faster than even we expected them to. In other words, we made all these predictions of how things would be reversed in China and we felt on the basis of our analysis of the class forces at work that these reversals really would happen. Of course, there were those who insisted that there would not be such reversals, and yet everything happened very quickly and far surpassed what even we had insisted on. So the denials of the upholders of Deng Xiaoping (for example, our own Mensheviks), the denials of the upholders of the coup in China in various places, their initial insistence that there wouldn't be such reversals very quickly became ludicrous and laughable. The terms very quickly outstripped the argument and contention about whether those initial reversals that we'd pretty much predicted would come to pass: it went way, way beyond that.

What brought this analogy to mind was the resurgent racism in the U.S. in this period. The whole scene where things you thought were long since settled are not only called into question but the verdicts of the '60s are being trampled on. Things which were long ago discredited are now being upheld as if "naturally everybody understands them except troublemakers." The idea is in vogue now that "the U.S. is a color-blind society and anybody who says it isn't is obviously racist, i.e., Black people who object to racism and national oppression are obviously racist because they talk about the fact that because they're Black, they are discriminated against and oppressed. Obviously they're racist. Just to talk about that situation makes you a

racist because this is a society where there is no racism. Or the only racism is if somebody explicitly says that they're going to discriminate on the basis of race, and then if they're white there might be justification and if they're Black they are a racist." This is really what's coming out of the ruling class and the ruling class propaganda circles these days.

This is specifically what made this analogy to China to come to mind. Now, of course, these are fundamentally different situations, need we recall. In China the proletariat was in power and there was a Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat where there were further breakthroughs and advances made. The reversing of verdicts there was part of reversing the whole dictatorship of the proletariat in China and restoring capitalism on the basis of the coup. Whereas in the U.S., of course, unfortunately, there's never yet been the dictatorship of the proletariat, and the imperialists have remained firmly in power up to now. But I think the important thing for us to grasp, and the way in which there is a real aspect of reversal of verdicts in the U.S. too, is in this sense: Although the ruling class always ruled and while it even brought down more intensified, more vicious repression in the face of the mass upheavals that went on in the '60s, nevertheless, through the course of the '60s, the ruling class *lost the initiative to a considerable degree, politically and ideologically*. The ruling class did not have the political and ideological initiative—through the course of the '60s, the ruling class lost it to a significant degree.

Now, obviously, in the final analysis they continued, even at the high point of the '60s, to set the terms, not only in the sense of who ruled and what the basic decisions would be about in U.S. society and the world (insofar as they controlled and influenced it), but in the final analysis they also set the terms of debate about things. Still, as I've said before, sometimes there's a lot of distance between here and "in the final analysis." In that distance there was a lot of room for the initiative to be seized by opposition forces of various kinds in the '60s. And to a large degree these forces of opposition, including a growing revolutionary trend, did seize the initiative in various ways. But because fundamentally—and this is of course the most decisive point to grasp here—because fundamentally there was no change, because state power never changed, the initiative could not be maintained by the opposition

forces. I do think, though, that if you look at it in that light – in terms of the initiative, politically and ideologically – there is validity to this analogy of reversal of verdicts.

It is striking. It came out, for example, in the whole Isiah Thomas-Larry Bird episode of 1987, which there have been a lot of good exchanges about in the *Revolutionary Worker*. People wrote in and so on. Isiah Thomas was put on the spot, hauled before the Inquisition and forced to answer a question like: What's the difference between your saying that Larry Bird is overrated because he's white and Al Campanis saying that Black people are physically and intellectually incapable of being good swimmers or being in managerial or intellectual, thinking positions in baseball – really in society in general? That anybody could actually sit there and ask a question like that shows you how dramatically there is a reactionary offensive. So if anything, in our fundamentally correct basic analysis of the decade, I think at the beginning of the decade we underestimated the degree to which there would be these reversals. We underestimated the severity, extent, and all-encompassing character of the repression that would accompany the intensification of the underlying contradictions that are shaping and characterizing this decade. We have been getting on top of this and have been doing increasing exposure and raising the combativity of the masses – around this as well as other outrages – and we have a lot of work to do to heighten that combativity and the resistance, and of course the all-around preparation for things going over to an all-out revolutionary struggle.

Protracted Hot Spots

Returning more to the international dimension and the working out of these contradictions, I think there is an interesting point to ponder in terms of its implications and what we can learn from this point: Entering the decade, you could say that, besides being characterized by the overall and intensifying interimperialist contradiction, things were characterized to a considerable extent by the revolutions in Iran and Nicaragua, which closed the last decade and opened this one. And to a large degree, this has remained the case throughout the decade. Events in these two countries, which began as revolutions, have persisted as "hot spots" – along with other areas of similarly intense contradictions including Afghanistan, which has been linked with events in Iran and also "opened the decade"

(though not with a revolution but a Soviet invasion).

In other words, Iran and Nicaragua have remained very pivotal points and concentration points of world contradictions of various kinds. I think this is kind of an important illustration of the gathering together and intensifying of world contradictions which remain unresolved and which are heading increasingly toward an explosive resolution. I raise this as just something to think about. I'm not saying that we should make a general law out of this kind of thing or take a particular phenomenon and try to generalize it beyond the point where it has value, so that it turns into its opposite and becomes some kind of mechanical formulation. But I do think that it's interesting, it does show something about the way in which these contradictions are bound together.

At the same time, this touches on the question of "dress rehearsal" in various aspects, particularly looking on the international level. This "dress rehearsal" aspect applies, I think, both in terms of "them vs. them" – that is, the inter-imperialist contradiction, the U.S.-led bloc and the Soviet-led bloc and their confrontation, leading toward world war – and on the other hand, in terms of "us vs. them" – that is, the trend toward revolution in the world. In other words, there can be seen in these events an aspect of "dress rehearsal" both of interimperialist war and of revolution against imperialism.

Further, in terms of the international dimension, specifically the international communist movement, I went back and read over the text of the talk which I gave several years ago which was reprinted in *Revolution* magazine in the spring of '84, "Advancing the World Revolutionary Movement: Questions of Strategic Orientation." I found this to be overall very correct and important in its continuing application to the situation today. I found it particularly important to go back to and to take as a basic point of orientation this question of combining Lenin's famous statement on the essence of internationalism – that is, there is one and only one kind of internationalism, working for proletarian revolution in one's own country and supporting this and only this line and struggle in all other countries – combining that with the strategic approach that is discussed in that talk, "Advancing the World Revolutionary Movement: Questions of Strategic Orientation," the approach of focusing on points of strategic concentration in the world where breakthroughs may be more

possible and at the same time more decisive for the whole world revolutionary movement at any given time.

This does relate to the question of these hot spots I just referred to. Of course, there's also the problem that what you—that is, the subjective factor, the conscious revolutionary forces, most especially the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement—what you can actually affect may not be one-to-one in line with where the contradictions are objectively the sharpest. In other words, Nicaragua is an example of a very intense concentration point of world contradictions, but that doesn't mean that the RIM can affect things in Nicaragua perhaps as much as it can in other parts of the world, including very important parts of the world. But I still think there is, in an overall sense, the question of combining the two—combining Lenin's definition of proletarian internationalism with this approach of looking on the world level and identifying and focusing special attention and effort on areas where the breakthroughs may be more possible (and that means taking into account the subjective factor as well as the objective conditions) and more decisive at any given time. So, I just wanted to reemphasize that, in reading over "Advancing," I found this point to be extremely important.

To review and sum up on this first point: Our basic analysis and characterization of the decade—the gathering together and heightening of the contradictions on a world scale and the struggle between the two main trends in the world, that is, the trend toward war, which is still the main trend, and the trend toward revolution, which however is a growing trend in the world—all this analysis is fundamentally correct and crucially important. The point is, then, to do our utmost in acting upon this situation to move things the farthest and the fastest toward revolution on the basis of proletarian internationalism in light of what was discussed above.

II. Doing Our Duty "At Home"

That takes me to the second point: More on doing our duty "at home." This, of course, is a conscious echo of the moving lines from the *Internationale*, "We must ourselves decide our duty, we must decide and do it well," which remain our basic point of orientation. To look at this in general terms, we have addressed and answered the fun-

damental, strategic question: "Is the October Revolution still the basic road for revolution in imperialist countries including the U.S.?" The answer we have given I would characterize as, "Yes, but. . . ."

I've spoken to this in some aspects before, but what I want to raise and focus on here is a point I would characterize this way: The history of our movement, and in particular in terms of its three milestones—that is, Marx, Lenin, and Mao—this history has been a history of the increasing separation of the revolutionary movement from the labor movement.

And if we look at this again in historical and international perspective, we can see once more a way in which the October Revolution itself was a key turning point or pivotal point in this regard too. If you look at the history of the First International and the parties which grew out of it—up to and including the parties that were dominant going into and through most of World War 1, in particular the German Social Democratic Party—there was a very close identification of the revolutionary movement with the labor movement. But as things have developed, and as the communist movement has become more truly an international movement, with the October Revolution and since—and particularly as the storm centers of revolutionary struggle have shifted more and more since that time toward what we commonly refer to now as the Third World—there has been, I believe, an increasing separation of the revolutionary movement from the labor movement. And if the October Revolution in Russia was a key turning point in this, the Chinese Revolution represented a further qualitative leap.

This brings up the question that the Communist Party of Peru, our Peruvian comrades, has raised in terms of the need to—as they put it—break out of the vicious circle of only carrying out mass political work and mass political struggle and never seizing the opportunity to actually initiate and carry out the armed struggle. It seems to me that this separation of the revolutionary movement from the labor movement expresses itself in terms of the fact that you have to make a basic decision about what you're building. If you're trying to build a labor movement, however militantly you go about this and however much you may attach and tack on revolutionary slogans and propaganda, this will ultimately be a reformist movement. Is that your goal, or are you trying to build a revolutionary movement

which, as we have correctly pointed out, will include economic demands and economic struggles as part of its overall process and overall character, but as a very definitely subordinate part of it? It seems to me that this is a basic question of principle and of orientation, both in Third World countries and in imperialist countries — though this will have different specific application in the different types of countries.

If we can shift for a moment to the international dimension again, in order to shed more light on this and put it in more global strategic terms, I think there's a similar or parallel question that's arisen in the Third World in the context of the very dramatic and profound changes that have taken place over the last several decades. These changes have resulted both from the anarchy of capitalism asserting itself and also from some conscious economic and political policy and maneuvering on the part of the imperialists. There have been, in particular, some significant transformations in the countryside and along with this the massive movements of people from the countryside to the city. But, strategically, the character of these societies — and in particular their character of being dominated by imperialism and of being marked by the kind of contradictions that of necessity call forth a new-democratic revolution — that strategic character has not fundamentally changed, as a general rule.

In other words, there is in these countries — or many, or perhaps one could say most, of them — the need for tactical adjustment in the forms of struggle and in the particular application of the basic strategy, but the fundamental road of revolution and the basic strategy remains the same. It remains the new-democratic revolution. And fundamentally, in terms of the seizure of power, the road to revolution remains a question of finding the ways to initiate the armed struggle in the countryside and carrying out — as a general rule, and not without any exception but as a general rule — the strategic road of surrounding the cities from the countryside.

Now there is, of course, as we must never forget, the fundamental difference between the Third World and imperialist countries, in terms of their position in the world network of imperialist relations and in terms of the conditions within the countries themselves. It is very important to keep in mind these differences and how they impinge on and set the terms of the question of strategic road. But it's

also important to have a sweeping view of this basic question of strategy that I'm talking about — what you could call the world-historic trend of the increasing separation of the revolutionary movement and revolutionary struggle from the labor movement. As a basic point of orientation this applies in both types of countries.

Mood of '60s, Mood of '80s

So in application once again to the situation in the U.S. — and returning to the points raised previously, in particular the difference between the '60s and the '80s, which we've addressed from a number of angles — there was, obviously, in the '60s a major social upheaval. In fact, social upheaval is what characterized that decade, as we all know. But what was shaping the character of the social and political movements and upheavals of the '60s? What was fundamentally shaping their character was, of course, what was happening on the world scale. But specifically within the U.S. there was also the question of major socioeconomic transformations that were going on for a number of different reasons. The masses of Black people were being uprooted from a situation of basically semifeudal exploitation and oppression concentrated in the South and were being hurled, in a sense, into the cities of the North and also the South and into a different position in relationship to the overall production relations. They were being thrown into the lower ranks of the proletariat and massively into the ranks of the under-employed and unemployed. Without being mechanical materialist, without making a one-to-one, direct, and absolute down-the-line identification between the form of socioeconomic upheaval and the forms of social and political struggle that took place, I think there is a very identifiable correspondence. And I think it is important for us to understand that correspondence in order to be able to sharpen our tactics as well as our sense of the strategic road to power. In other words, in the '60s, in relation to what was set loose in the society by the socioeconomic transformations and upheavals, there were certain forms of struggle that developed in terms of the demands people made, the ways in which they came together to struggle, the things they were going up against, and even the ethos and spirit of the time. This took place within a context in the U.S. itself as well as a certain world context.

I spoke to this some in *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?* in terms of the rising expectations of that time, the

expectations and aspirations being frustrated, and how this sharply affected particularly sections of the Black petty bourgeoisie but also more generally the Black masses. There was a certain optimistic spirit, in a sense, during that time. Optimism about being able to improve your situation gave rise to very radical expressions, even revolutionary expressions, when such aspirations were thwarted. But there was a certain "tone" to that period, as well as certain particular demands and forms of struggle, that in an overall sense — and this is what I think is important to grasp — corresponded to the underlying socioeconomic transformations that were going on, specifically within the country as well as more generally in the world as a whole.

The reason I'm dwelling on this point a bit is that I think it is important to grasp the question of what are the forms of struggle that we can expect to arise, first of all spontaneously, and what are the obstacles to developing a revolutionary movement that we can expect to be posed because of the specific situation that the masses of people find themselves in? This question must be addressed particularly in regard to our party's social base and most particularly Black people and other oppressed nationalities, especially the proletarians among them, concentrated in the urban ghettos and barrios. What is the mood likely to be, what are the kinds of spontaneous forms of struggle that will develop, and what are some of the obstacles and drags on the development of a revolutionary movement? All of this is from the point of view, of course, of how to overcome such obstacles, how to prepare the ground and lead things toward the carrying over of the struggle to its highest form when the objective and subjective conditions have been ripened to the point where that's possible. At the same time, it is very important to look at this in a very dialectical way, in a dynamic way, and not look at it statically and metaphysically — like one-two-three, everything has to fall in place just perfectly in terms of some prefabricated and *a priori* set of absolute standards (i.e., there must be so much economic deprivation, there must be so much repression, or there must be so much social disillusionment, etc., etc., before there can be a revolutionary opening, in some sort of textbook or mechanical way).

That leads me to the next question: the question of forms of struggle, the question of what really has to be in existence for things to go over to the highest form of struggle, and the

question of the relationship between those two things — the things that might develop more spontaneously, on the one hand, and what factors need to exist in order to go over to the highest form of struggle, on the other hand.

It has been noted, in the context of discussing different aspects of the work and initiatives that we're trying to carry out, that much of what we're trying to do even right now is very new and strategically we are after all trying to do something that's never been done before in the world. Of course, in a fundamental sense, this is always true of any revolution in any country at any given time. But there are certain particularities and more specifically there are certain definite difficulties in trying to actually carry out a revolution in this kind of country, an imperialist country, and the U.S. in particular.

There will be and already are spontaneous outpourings of anger and rebellions of one sort or another, which the bourgeoisie refers to as "riots" and "social disorders" and so on. There will be and there are today political expressions of the outpouring of the outrage of the masses at things that happen — for example, Howard Beach and other similar events. These things will take place and there will be many things that will be recognizable from our past experience of, say, the '60s and will be somewhat predictable in that sense. But there also will be many things that will be new and different. And I think there also will be a different mood, tenor, and tone to much of what will exist among our social base, even when they do lash out and rise up in various forms of rebellion and outrage.

I remember reading fairly recently the comments of someone (maybe a store owner or someone like that) who was in a neighborhood that was at the heart of one of the major rebellions in the '60s. He pointed to the area around him, how it's even more run-down and broken down now, basically looking bombed out and devastated, and he commented on how the youth are hanging around with even less going for them than they had in the '60s, even more a desperate and angry situation. But he said about the '60s and the rebellion then, "Well, then people had some hope, and when you have hope there's a point to fighting back. And now people don't have hope." That speaks to the questions — the not always explicitly stated, but always present questions — "will this kind of rebellion happen again?", "when will it happen?", and "why hasn't it already happened given how bad things are?"

I found this shopkeeper's comments interesting and somewhat insightful. I think what we should learn from it though—looking at it in the light of our understanding and the science that we wield to get to the essence of things—is that this poses the question for us of how to motivate and move our social base as soon as possible toward the highest form of struggle. We can't expect the motion and development of things and the all-around preparation for revolution to find the same expressions as we've experienced in the past, either ideologically—or psychologically, to put it that way, in terms of people's mood—or in terms of forms of struggle. We can't expect that it's going to develop in all the same ways or have even the same tenor as it did in the '60s.

As great as they were, the '60s after all did not go all the way, and we need to go all the way with this. So naturally there will be many things that will be new and different, if only because of that. But also there will be things that will be new and different because of the character of this period as opposed to the '60s. Without getting mechanical about it, there is a fundamental difference in terms of what's up in the world, in terms of what time it is in the U.S. as well as in the world, in terms of the depth and intensity of the contradictions and how they pose themselves in very real and stark terms in this period.

This is a very important thing for us to grasp and for us to be focusing a lot of attention and thought on, pondering and digging into it: The forms of struggle and the ways of people moving and being moved toward the fully revolutionary position—that is, toward the position where they are down for the whole deal—are going to find different expression now as compared to the '60s and the very great upheavals that took place then. Not everything will be different but there will be some ways, including some very fundamental ways, in which things will find different expression and *should* find different expression.

"Three Needs"

This touches a little on the "viciousness" point, which I want to come back to a little bit later. But I won't go further into that right now. Rather, I want to turn to the question of what do we need in order to really have a basis for making a Beginning. What do we need among our social base, and among our most bedrock social base specifically? What do we need, that is, besides the necessary fea-

tures in the objective situation, the kind of acute crisis and expression of contradictions that would provide the stage upon which such a Beginning could actually be made?

There are three basic things I want to speak to in answering this question. These can be called the "three needs" (or the "three what-do-we-needs"). These are: (1) A revolutionary movement and a politicized, radicalized atmosphere among our social base, the proletarian masses, and in society generally; (2) A strong party organization and a solid organized base of support for the party, especially among the most bedrock solid social base; and (3) Leaps in forging the multinational unity of the proletariat and leaps in forging the solid core of the broader united front, under proletarian leadership.

Before taking up these three points, however, it is important to stress that these are in no way a substitute for, nor a new way of formulating, our central task. Our central task remains as we have formulated it: create public opinion, seize power. These "three needs" must be taken up in the context of carrying out that central task—they have meaning only in relation to carrying out that central task overall and getting into position for making a Beginning. With this in mind, I want to get into these three points.

First, there has to be a revolutionary movement and there has to be a politicized atmosphere, both in terms of our social base specifically and more generally in society. This is necessary to give our social base itself a fuller vision of the possibilities. And, specifically in terms of what I was just talking about, you don't just come out of desperation and despair and some of the forms of activity that such desperation and despair spontaneously give rise to—you don't just come up out of that and see the revolutionary possibilities without the atmosphere becoming politicized. You don't just see the revolutionary possibilities because you are angry and you want to lash back. That will spontaneously give rise to other forms of activity. And even if we just try to add our political agitation and propaganda and our vision—which is all very necessary for us to do—but if we just try to add that to this general mood of desperation and despair, then that will not be sufficient. So there has to be a revolutionary movement and a politicized atmosphere among our social base, where it lives and breathes and works, and more generally in society.

Now, again, we can't look at these things *a priori*, and

we have to guard against the danger of thinking that there's a predetermined standard, mathematically precise, that has to be fulfilled, a-b-c, before anything can happen. But in living, dynamic terms there has to be a revolutionary movement. There has to be a politicized atmosphere to give the social base itself, as I said, a fuller vision of the possibilities and to make it more possible for the social base in turn—and particularly its advanced expressions, its revolutionary expressions—to have broad impact and influence in society and to win allies.

To put it in basic terms, it's much more of an attraction, it draws and compels other strata in society much more, to see a revolutionary movement with a conscious political expression—not an "intellectualized" political expression, but a conscious, clear political revolutionary thrust—coming out of our basic social base. This has a very great attraction and exerts a very great positive compulsion on broad strata in society who are potential allies. They are much more drawn to that, for example, than they are to just seeing some of the spontaneous ways in which the despair and anger take form. They recoil in the face of such spontaneous expressions—a lot of it because of white chauvinism and their class position—but at the same time we have to recognize that for better reasons as well, those spontaneous forms are not going to have the same attractive force in a positive way as when the same anger and outrage begin to assume a very clear, basic political content and revolutionary thrust. This is necessary in order to exert that kind of attraction and positive compulsion broadly in society and draw potential allies toward the revolutionary position, to attract them to the revolutionary pole.

This brings me back to the question of viciousness. We have pointed to the question of the viciousness that spontaneously does exist among our social base, especially the youth. I think it's very important that we have brought up this question in our leaflets and spoken agitation. And in an all-around way we've spoken to and handled this question well. That is, we have made clear that we do not recoil from this viciousness, we recognize it as an expression of outrage at conditions that *no one* should have to put up with or will put up with in the final analysis. But I do think that it's important to stress that here too the point is *uniting and diverting* and not worshipping and tailing this expression of outrage. Perhaps that's something that seems obvious, but maybe it isn't obvious on the other hand.

I think there has been—I have seen in reading reports, for example—a certain tendency in the direction of such tailing. This tailing has taken the form almost of acting as though this viciousness in and of itself is a revolutionary expression or something which should be upheld as such, rather than this is an expression of a refusal to put up with conditions of oppression, exploitation, and desperation that no one should have to put up with, and in that sense it is to be united with. But it is also to be *diverted and transformed* into something that has a clear political expression and a very clear and solid revolutionary thrust to it. This is a very important point to keep in mind and stress. As Mao said, a line and viewpoint must be explained repeatedly. This point about viciousness must also be explained repeatedly, because it's a kind of a new question. It's new in the sense of the attention that we've been correctly focusing on it.

This in a way leads me back to the point that I raised earlier in reference to the Communist Party of Peru and their formulation of breaking through the cycle of simply carrying out political work that degenerates into reformist political work after a certain point—and actually finding the ways to initiate, carry out, and carry through the highest form of struggle. As I've said, one of the essential ingredients for this to happen is that the social base needs a revolutionary movement and a politicized atmosphere with a clear revolutionary thrust. But, at the same time, there is a different kind of vicious circle we also face on another level. That is, how do we break through the vicious circle where we need a revolutionary movement, with masses becoming activated and things heading toward going over to the highest form of struggle—but we can't really get it going for lack of having it. You can't get it because you ain't got it.

This poses itself very sharply for the advanced who are drawn forward to our political work, our line, and our vision. More than a few become active, yet also more than a few of them after becoming active fall away or have real difficulty because they still are existing in an atmosphere where there's not much of a revolutionary movement, there's not a politicized atmosphere, and where the drag and pull of spontaneity and backwardness and ultimately the pressure coming from the ruling class in various forms drag people down and make it very difficult for people to breathe politically. So how do you break through that? In

other words, how do you get such a revolutionary movement going when there isn't one and when the advanced who are drawn toward the revolutionary line find themselves having to operate still in a situation where there's not yet such a favorable political climate?

"Two Maximizings"

There are two essential points I want to raise in relation to that. We could call them the "two maximizings." The first "maximizing" is a point we've stressed before, but it cannot be stressed too many times and is important to bring up in light of all I've been talking about. It is maximizing gains in terms of this politicized atmosphere and this revolutionary movement that I've referred to. We need to maximize the situation — or make the maximum advances in situations — where the masses, in particular the masses of our social base, are called into militant action and the atmosphere does become politically charged over a period of time. The second "maximizing" is maximizing the development — and the basic thrust against the system — of movements among other strata.

In both of these "two maximizings," and especially in the first, relating more directly to our social base, party building is extremely important. At the same time, though, party building is a very important task in its own right. That is, without building the party it is impossible even to build a revolutionary movement today — and certainly one that is part of preparing for the seizure of power. Party building cannot be reduced to a "by-product" of the work to foster a political movement today, or something mainly to serve today's tasks. Party building is also, and principally, a "seed for the future" — a task that prepares, in its own right, for the revolutionary seizure of power (and even beyond). Having emphasized that, I want to return to the first of these "two maximizings": maximizing advances in developing the revolutionary movement among our social base, particularly in times when things sharpen up and mass outpourings flare up.

We've spoken to this before in terms of Lenin's formulation of acute minicrises in society. What are examples of this today? Things like Howard Beach. Things like the outpourings, or at least the growing outrage and protests, around Simpson-Rodino. (Here it is also important to bring up the question of abortion. Although to a significant degree we still find conscious political motion around this

developing largely among nonproletarian strata, all this does have impact within our social base as well. And a related question that has very definitely created an uproar and definite stirrings among our social base is the whole struggle going on around distribution of birth control to youth, including at schools — for example, at the high school in Chicago, DuSable High School, which was written about in the *RW*, the battle over the birth control clinic. There is a very powerful, potentially explosive mix here: The whole offensive of the imperialists against women merges very strongly here with vital concerns of our social base.)

So that's one kind of "maximizing" — maximizing the development of the political atmosphere, of a revolutionary movement, and as a very important aspect of that, party building. This applies particularly within these minicrises, and especially within those occasions where militant expressions of outrage and rebellion *do* burst forth among our social base.

The second "maximizing" — maximizing the development, and the basic thrust against the system, of movements among other strata — is important in its own right and also important in terms of its effect, indirectly as well as directly, on our social base (that is, in terms of what direct impact it has on our social base as well as the general atmosphere it creates in society which our social base is influenced by). This second "maximizing" can be seen in things like the struggles around Central America, the struggle around abortion, and in other ways — including in the development of Refuse & Resist! These are ways in which these other strata mainly — that is, middle-class strata, nonproletarian strata, potential allies of the proletarian revolutionary movement — are called into struggle and political movements develop, some even quite militantly at times, among these strata.

Within this, there are some key points to stress as well. I would like to specifically speak to the question of Refuse & Resist! and its importance. This has importance as a broad united front effort which has great potential to deal some real political blows at the ruling class and its whole program — its whole offensive at this point — and has a very important role to play in terms of generally contributing to the political atmosphere that will be more favorable to the development of the revolutionary movement among our social base.

I think one of the main things holding back people in our social base, particularly among the oppressed nationalities, is this whole line that they are encircled and suppressed and that they have no allies. That they're up against the whole world, or all white people, etc. (There is something I want to come back to later — an idea I had for an article that I've held off on writing — a little article whose title would be "What's Wrong with White People?" Anyway, a little bit more on that later.) But this is spontaneously the way the question poses itself, and not without any reason, to a lot of Black people and other oppressed nationalities in our social base. They feel encircled and suppressed, and as a matter of very conscious policy by the ruling class, they are constantly bombarded with the idea that they are completely encircled and suppressed and everybody's against them.

I tried to speak to this, in one aspect, with that short article on "The Way Things Are and The Way Things Change" coming off the twentieth anniversary of the Detroit rebellion. It's something that has to be repeatedly hit at in our exposure (in terms of the newspaper and in our agitation), but also it's important that people see in living, concrete reality the contradiction and struggle that characterizes the society and the fact that there are many allies and potential allies out there. This is something that is very uplifting to people among the most bedrock social base, and it's something without which there will not be the development of the kind of revolutionary movement that we need — that can go over, when the conditions are there, to the highest form of struggle. In other words, it's a crucial part of preparing the ground. From our point of view, this is one of the main contributions that things like Refuse & Resist! can make. (Of course, others in Refuse & Resist! who agree with the importance of building a strong counteroffensive against Resurgent America do not agree with us on the contribution of Refuse & Resist! to preparing the ground for proletarian revolution. That is the nature of united front efforts such as Refuse & Resist! — there is unity but there are also differences and struggle, and the important thing is that all this be open, above-board, and principled.)

Beginning about now and over the next year or so in the U.S. the big focal point politically — in terms of what the bourgeoisie and the media are going to be putting forward about what politics is all about and what really counts

politically — is going to be, increasingly, the whole question of the elections.

This brings up the whole Jesse Jackson thing. We can't expect this has been settled just because we punched some holes in it at the time of his crawling performance at the Democratic Convention in 1984. In fact, it seems (at least from what I can gather) that Jackson is being given even bigger promotion this time, among broader strata. Things like this, or the battle around the Supreme Court nomination, are the kinds of things that people are going to be increasingly told are not only important political battles but are also things over which they perhaps can have some real influence and impact. So that's going to exert, when it combines with spontaneous tendencies, a powerful pull, especially on middle strata. We have to know how to correctly understand and deal with this in order to correctly unite and divert things in a direction that helps and strengthens the revolutionary movement.

Party Organization

Now I want to return to the larger question of what I've referred to as the "three needs": (1) A revolutionary movement and a politicized, radicalized atmosphere among our social base and in society generally; (2) A strong party organization and a solid organized base for the party, especially among the most bedrock solid social base; and (3) Leaps in forging the multinational unity of the proletariat and leaps in forging the solid core of the broader united front, a united front under proletarian leadership. Having gone into the first of these "needs" at some length, I'd now like to dig into the second — a strong party organization and a solid organized base for the party, especially among the most bedrock solid social base — those whose whole life situation and experience most prepared them to embrace, and to actively take up, the struggle to radically and thoroughly overturn the existing social conditions and transform society.

Here I want to call attention to the question of the relationship between the special concentrations that we're making among our social base, to build such a bedrock base looking to the future on the one hand and on the other hand our overall political work among our social base (and more generally). The relationship between those two things is a very important question to continue to come back to, and it is very important to continue to give specific

attention and specific guidance to the carrying out of work and efforts around these things. Within that, attention needs to be given to such things as the video *They Say They Will*, as well as use of the newspaper, but also tapes of spoken agitation, tapes where written material is recorded and other ways in which things are made more popular and accessible, specifically in terms of aiming them at our social base. Popularization of our basic line and analysis of the situation and the revolutionary possibilities is crucial both in terms of our broad political work among our social base and in terms of our special concentrations and party building initiatives. And it is very important in handling the relationship between them.

There's also the question, related to all this, of the dialectic between our organizational methods and our basic politics, specifically as concentrated in the major and special efforts that are being made to build a solid political and organizational base among our social base. Part of this is the question of doing things with some new organizational methods that would themselves help strengthen the point of what we're all about, the seriousness with which we're taking up our work, and the possibility of what we're talking about. Organizational methods that would make this a little more living for people, that would point toward the future. The very application of these methods, and the carrying out of things in this way would – without calling specific attention to such organizational methods – give a sense of the possibilities. That is, merely by *carrying them out* – and not by standing up and shouting, "Here we are, look at our clever organizational methods," thereby undoing what we are trying to do. After all, the masses are not stupid. One thing they pay great attention to is precisely this question, because it has very dramatic consequences for them, it is something they are very acutely aware of from their experience. But the mere carrying out of our work with some new – and successful! – organizational methods is something that could have a very big impact.

I still remember when I was just first getting really active around the Vietnam War, back more than twenty years ago, there was a summer, maybe it was the summer of 1965, and I had some kind of an office job where I had to wear a suit and tie. I came from work one day and went to a demonstration in San Francisco against the Vietnam War, and there was a need for people to go inside and leaflet the

hotel where there was some figure of the ruling class speaking or something. The demonstration was outside the hotel, and they wanted people to get inside and get the literature to the people and the workers in the hotel. So, naturally, being dressed in a suit and tie, I and a few other people were selected as likely candidates to slip by the police lines and get in and distribute these leaflets. And we did. We walked right in, in our very respectable clothes.

We were each assigned certain floors, and we put all the leaflets very quickly under all the doors. We had just finished when the elevator door opened; we stepped on the elevator and went down. I did so just in time to hear a conversation between a man and his son – a very upper-middle-class man, you know, the type that spends his time partly in business and partly on the golf course. His son had obviously just asked him, "But how are these people able to get all these leaflets here like this?", because the father was saying, "Well, you have to understand, these people are *very organized*." And naturally I'm standing there trying to repress a real outward expression of satisfaction at this whole thing. In that case it was having an impact on someone who would be, at best, a very vacillating ally. But nevertheless, you can magnify that in terms of the impact that it has on friendly forces, particularly on our social base, when you're able to do things in a way which itself, in the mere doing of it, points to and strengthens the sense that perhaps this is possible after all. Not that this answers the question in and of itself, certainly, but it can and does contribute to that.

Revolutionary Optimism

So here I would think it is important to stress more generally the question, specifically in terms of work in our social base, of party spirit and what we call "first-stringism." Along with that I want to emphasize the question of revolutionary optimism. Earlier I talked about how this is not a period, unlike the '60s, that gives rise to a lot of spontaneous optimism, which to a significant degree characterized a lot of the masses in revolt in various ways in the '60s. And I think it's very important for us to put forward revolutionary optimism – without hype – in what you could call a very down-to-earth or very matter-of-fact way, without being dry and dull, obviously. In other words, a revolutionary optimism that's really grounded in reality, grounded in materialism. This is an expression of the whole point that Mao made

about how thoroughgoing materialists are fearless. But at the same time I am stressing the need for a real, bold spirit of revolutionary optimism.

We should have and project the sense that while a lot of the masses feel hopeless, revolution is the hope of the hopeless, and we do represent revolution. Of course, we should not start coming off like a religious sect, but we do have to give people a sense of the larger vision which we do have and which they need to have, and which they can grasp. It is very important, especially in these times, that in the very way we carry out our work and relate politically to people we project party spirit, "first-stringism," and revolutionary optimism.

In this sense, there is even an aspect in which we can give the real answer to the very phony and contrived question-and-answer that the latest Michael Jackson thing attempts to do: "Who's bad? I'm bad." We can give a real answer to that: "Who's bad? *We're* bad." This kind of thing does come up in our social base because of a lot of the spontaneous pull we've talked about in terms of the analogy to the movie *Escape from New York* (where "The Element" is militarily penned up in New York and left to plunder each other). The point is not to *act* bad – and I mean act in the sense of pretending to be bad, the baddest ones around in the wrong sense. But there is a real point here in terms of going up against this whole thing of *Escape from New York*: They give you this piece of shit and they tell you that you can fight it out over this piece of shit. Or they say, "You women, your role in life is to have babies and that's the only way you can have any worth," and then they come down on you for doing that too.

What we want to pose to people is that you haven't talked about bad until you've talked about really taking on this government, and that's what we're talking about. You want to talk about being bad, then that's how you can talk about *really* being bad, and that's what we're about. Without hyping it. You don't have to hype that because that *is* bad. And anybody who wants to talk about that – who wants to talk about it seriously, and really has got a plan and a strategy and a vision about how to do it – that's somebody bad. I think people can recognize it, so you don't have to hype it, but there is a real way to pose that question to people, particularly up against the spontaneous pull of a lot of the ways this viciousness does express itself. So I think there is a very big role for this kind of thing, but only

in the context of the kind of overall work of preparing the ground and carrying out our central task that we've been stressing.

Why You Need This Kind of Party

I want to address again this question of doing our duty to make revolution in the U.S., or, as we used to say in the '60s, "doing the dog right here in the heartland of Babylonian madness." I'd like to speak to that specifically in terms of the party, the vanguard leadership of the revolution.

Recently, I was listening to this latest album by Little Steven, *Freedom – No Compromise*. It has a lot of good things in it, politically, and musically as well in my opinion. But it also has this song, "No More Party's." The basic line of it is, "I don't want no party saying they speak for me. I've got my own identity." Well, we have to say very straightforwardly to people in general, and particularly to people who put forward this line, that the real question is not a party or no party. The most fundamental question is, "Are you going to leave this system intact or are you going to get rid of it?" Have you seriously and fully confronted the question of what it's going to take to eliminate all these evils that this system causes? Have you really confronted the fact that it's going to take a revolution and the overthrow of this system to deal with all this? Once you really confront that, honestly and straight-up, once you come fully up against that, then you come right up against the need for a party.

Somebody's going to run the society. It's being run by somebody right now, and people are speaking for you right now. These people are doing things *and making you do things* right now. They are setting the terms and the context for whatever you do, however good your intentions. That context, that framework, that agenda, those limitations, those confines are being set. They are being set by the people – the ruling class – who run the system and by the workings of the system.

To pull out a line from another singer who was once good, Bob Dylan, "Let us not talk falsely now, the hour is getting late." Let's not talk falsely now – not that people like Little Steven are deliberately lying – but let's talk about things the way they really are. The real question is: Do you see the need for revolution, have you really come up against and confronted the question of what is it going to take to do away with this system and put something else

in its place—a new system, a whole different basis on which people relate, and a whole different way in which the world is structured—a whole new world?

So once you come up against this, you come up against the need for a party. You can't get around it. You are not going to deal with all that has to be dealt with—you are not going to overthrow the system and make a different world under a different system and move on to all the things that have to be moved on to—unless you have a party to lead it. You are not going to do it, it is as simple as that. And the hour is getting late, so let us not talk falsely. Don't talk about how you don't want no party speaking for you. Just say you're not convinced of the need for revolution to overthrow this system. Because that's the basic question.

In thinking about this, my mind went back to the '60s and the experiences then. I turned over in my mind this big question: If certain things had fallen out a little bit differently in the '60s, could there have been at least a real attempt at a revolutionary struggle to seize power? Without trying to analyze the whole thing of the '60s right here, it is important to look at what shaped the people's struggles then and how did leading organizations and vanguard forces come forward within that. What was their character and what were they about at the time? And could they have led such an attempt at seizing power? In analyzing this you come up against the fact that there was a certain character, spontaneously, to the movements and struggles of that time which had its underlying basis in what was going on in the world generally, but also in terms of major social and economic changes, major dislocations and transformations, that were taking place in the U.S. itself. There were changes affecting students and youth broadly. There were the beginnings of big changes involving women. There was the Vietnam War and all the major social upheaval it caused in the U.S. Most basically, in terms of changes within U.S. society, masses of Black people were being uprooted from the land of the South and moving into the urban ghettos and the lower sections of the proletariat in the North and also in the South. Certain spontaneous forms of struggle came forward in response to that, and certain forms of organization, even certain ideological expressions, were also generated out of that. The point is not to be mechanical about it and say that certain forms of changes in the socioeconomic structure were bound to call forward certain exact forms of political struggle, certain

exact forms of mass resistance, and certain exact forms of party organization and of ideology, and that's that. But there were spontaneous pulls and there were these political, ideological, and organizational developments that had a certain underlying basis.

In this light, thinking back on some of the early discussions and struggle that I had with people like Huey Newton and Eldridge Cleaver—leaders of the Black Panther Party who had a big influence on me, moving me in a revolutionary direction—it strikes me now that on the one hand they were the most advanced revolutionaries in the U.S. at that time, yet even they never really developed a clear and full sense of what needed to be done. What were the changes that needed to be made in society and in the world? How were those changes going to be made? What was the road and strategy for doing that? What kind of ideology did you need? What kind of leadership did you need, and how should it organize itself? How should it mobilize and organize the masses? What did you have to go up against and defeat, and how were you going to do that? Not that nobody had any ideas about these questions, because within the Black Panther Party, and within the revolutionary movement as a whole, people debated a lot of these ideas, and there was a lot of conflict and struggle about these questions. But there was never a clear, unified, and fully correct sense of (a) even posing all those questions in that kind of way, and (b) answering them. And so you had a lot of different ideas in conflict but no clear, definite sense of these things.

What went along with that—the organizational expression that goes along with that—is that you had a Black Panther Party, for example, which was at one and the same time attempting to play a vanguard role but also rapidly drawing forward large numbers of masses who wanted to join it and become part of it. And the Panthers didn't develop the necessary organizational ideas and organizational methods to really be able to develop a solid vanguard organization and at the same time develop the ties and organizational links between it, as a vanguard, and broader masses who were being drawn toward it but who needed some basic political training before they would be ready to play a vanguard role. A big part of the reason why the Panthers were not able to do this is the vicious repression, including outright murder, that was brought down on the Panthers by the whole apparatus of the state and its

agents. But along with that, the Panthers, not surprisingly, shared many of the limitations of the movement of that period and its spontaneous ideology. Even the Panthers didn't develop the sense of the kind of bedrock organization that you would need to actually lay the basis for carrying out the highest form of struggle—for carrying out an armed struggle that really could overthrow the system and establish a new system.

Again, in analyzing this you can never leave aside the tremendous vicious repression that came down. But without ignoring that, what would have happened if in, say, '68 or '69, the Panthers had made the decision, "Okay, we've got to go for power"? Already at that point it would have been very difficult for them to disentangle themselves from the various problems with the forms of organization that had grown up in and around the Black Panther Party. In other words, there had been a tremendous influx of masses into the Panthers, but there had not been enough screening and not enough work with people to prepare them and to bring them along and *then* recruit and organize them into the Black Panther Party in a disciplined way. In the absence of that you had a lot of people who joined the BPP before they were ready, politically and ideologically, to act as members of a vanguard party. And you had a lot of police agents infiltrating into the BPP. It's not that people have to be highly intellectually developed or have years of experience in political movements before they can join a vanguard party. But they should have an understanding of its basic ideology and political program and some testing and tempering in carrying out revolutionary work before they join. But the experience of the BPP was not fully based on this approach.

So it would have been extremely difficult to go about recasting the BPP as the kind of organization with the kind of organized base among the masses that could have actually built up to and carried out the highest form of struggle and actually seized power. There was a lot of spontaneity, not only in terms of politics but in terms of organization—spontaneity in terms of how they saw what was necessary to do and how to go about doing it. There was a lot of mixed-bag character about all that, including in terms of organizational principles and approaches. You had, on the one hand, people talking about carrying out the armed struggle and really doing the dog, and on the other hand you had reformist politics, right within the same

Black Panther Party. You had people who were in no way prepared for revolution, who didn't understand the political necessity of it, weren't down for that, all mixed together with people who were.

The point of all this is what Mao Tsetung said: Without a Marxist-Leninist party, without a party organized in a Marxist-Leninist style and according to Marxist-Leninist methods of work, you can't do what has to be done, you can't make a revolution. Again, I'm looking back here, trying to learn some vital lessons for the future. My point is certainly not to come down on the Panthers, because they were in fact the most advanced revolutionary expression of the '60s and they made tremendous contributions. But we do have to learn from what wasn't done as well as what was, so we can do what has to be done this time around.

It is very important for people to grasp deeply—even within the ranks of our party, and more broadly among the masses—that our party represents the continuation, and the further development, of the most advanced revolutionary expressions that came out of that period of the '60s. We represent that ideologically, politically, and also organizationally. We still have a lot to learn. We have a lot to do to make further strides and leaps, especially in building our bedrock basis more solidly among the most reliable revolutionary forces in society. But nevertheless it is very important for this point to be grasped: We do have the basis to build the kind of party organization—we are in the process of building the kind of party organization and the organizational ties with the broad masses, on the basis of our ideology and politics—that could carry out the highest form of struggle and have a real chance at winning when the necessary conditions do come together.

To try to get the deepest sense of this and draw the deepest lessons, I went back and kind of walked through it step by step: What if we tried to do it back then in the '60s—"we" meaning the revolutionary movement broadly, with the Black Panther Party as the most advanced expression and, in that sense, a vanguard force—what would have happened? You immediately find that you would have come up against all these kinds of problems that I've spoken to. The mixed-bag kind of politics, ideology, and organization that would have made it extremely difficult to lay a solid base for and then really carry out that kind of struggle for power. I think it's extremely important that with all the ups and downs, the back-and-forth and ebbs

and flows of the period of twenty years since that time, there has been a definite progress forward, in terms of what our party represents and the ideological, political, and organizational foundation and methods that we have developed and strengthened.

We can proceed from where we are, preparing the ground organizationally as well as politically and ideologically, to be able to carry out that highest form of struggle when the objective conditions emerge. In other words, there is not built into the way we're doing things such a mess and such an entanglement of this and that, one thing and another thing, that we couldn't possibly do what has to be done. There is instead a solid basis — politically, ideologically, and organizationally — the basis to be able to move forward, overcoming all kinds of obstacles, and actually do it when the opening is there to be seized.

This is no small achievement — it is a very important positive factor for the international proletariat that such a party has been forged in such a country as the U.S. — right within this powerful imperialist state. But most of all, it is a great responsibility, to act as the vanguard for the revolution in the U.S. and contribute all we can to the cause of the international proletariat and its worldwide revolutionary struggle. This is an extremely important point for the party to grasp and act upon and for us to take home to the masses of people and really enable them to grasp it and act upon it.

This leads back, then, and also gives new and greater emphasis, to the point I raised earlier on the relationship between on the one hand our overall political work, especially in the social base, and on the other hand those special and concentrated efforts we're making to really build a solid base among the most bedrock social base for proletarian revolution. It underscores once again the importance of persevering in this basic orientation and with these special efforts. Without going into all the particulars right here, I think these efforts do represent some new important breakthroughs, or the basis and the road toward some new important breakthroughs, in terms of preparing the ground overall. It is very important that we continue to persevere in this and actually make the breakthroughs.

Building Revolutionary Unity

This brings us to the third basic point, in terms of what do we need to make a Beginning — the third of the "three

needs." We need to make great leaps in forging the revolutionary unity of the proletariat, particularly its advanced sections, of all nationalities, and great leaps in forging that solid core of the broader united front — the linking together, on a revolutionary basis, of the struggles of the oppressed nationalities against their oppression as peoples and the class-conscious struggle of the proletariat.

First of all, this is also something that can only be done — the uniting of the revolutionary proletarians of all nationalities and the bringing together of that solid core can only be done — on the basis of the development of a revolutionary movement. You can't do it in the absence of that. You can't do it just by agitating about class interests and doing revolutionary propaganda and exposing the system. All that is very important, it is the lifeblood of what we're doing, but you still have to have out of all these efforts the development of a revolutionary movement, a mass upsurge with a clear revolutionary thrust and a politicized atmosphere. Because otherwise you're not going to be able to overcome the divisions that the ruling class and the whole operation of the system and its whole history work to foster, the ways in which it divides the masses. There are very real things — including white supremacy and the corresponding ideology of white chauvinism, or racism — that constitute a very powerful barrier to the development of the kind of revolutionary movement and the highest form of struggle that must be developed.

So it can only be done on the basis of a movement and a politicized atmosphere with a clear revolutionary thrust, particularly among the advanced forces of the proletariat of all different nationalities. This is a point we've emphasized, but it needs to be reemphasized particularly in light of all our particular efforts now.

Youth and Unity

The youth are very important in this. In terms of the youth in particular and their pivotal role in this whole thing, one very contradictory, but in some important ways very positive, aspect of things is the whole cultural arena. Despite all the contradictions and all the differences between the youth of different nationalities, there is some mixing and merging and what we could call cross-fertilizing and cross-influencing of the different cultural forms — something that we've seen in the past and it seems there is a real aspect to it now — something that has to be built on.

Not that we want to mix everything into one eclectic mush, but there are these cross-fertilizations. Some of them have more negative reasons for them, maybe some groups doing crossover stuff just to "make it" in the "pop world" or whatever, but nevertheless, there are objective effects to things, too, and we have to build on the positive side of this. Sometimes some of the contradictions and antagonisms among different nationalities get attacked and broken down to a certain degree in the cultural sphere before they get broken down in the political sphere, or ideologically, in an all-around way. And this seems to be especially true among the youth.

This is just one factor worth paying attention to in this regard. But more generally in terms of the youth, there is the whole question of the political movements in society and revolutionary work among the youth, and specifically the role of our youth organization. Here I just want to reemphasize the whole question that has been focused on—the recognition of the need for further ruptures and leaps in the way we approach building the youth organization and especially in building it among youth from the social base. It's important that we pay attention to, and sum up more thoroughly, trends that may be out there among different sections of the youth. This means paying attention to trends among different nationalities, national particularities and different national characteristics among Latinos, Blacks, and others among the youth.

I've also seen a number of reports that indicate (I wouldn't want to make some general law out of this, or even declare it as definitely the case, but it is something to be investigated) that with regard to the woman question, in some ways some of the younger male youth, that is, maybe twelve to seventeen generally speaking, don't have all of the hang-ups of the "older youth," those eighteen to twenty-one. Again, this may not be valid as a general characterization, it may be only partial, but these kinds of things are important to be aware of and take into account—differences and different tendencies, different groupings within the youth, including among youth of our social base, and even among youth of the same nationality.

As I have stressed before, among the oppressed themselves, and especially for the men among them, the woman question is a touchstone and a basic dividing-line question. We must struggle with the men among the oppressed to take their stand firmly with the revolutionary position, to

join fully in the struggle to shatter the shackles on women. We must win them to thoroughly repudiate the notion that it is alright to accept the dog's life they give us under this system so long as the men are thrown the bone of being able to act as petty (and not-so-petty) tyrants oppressing women. There is no way we can—or should want to—break all the chains but one: breaking the shackles holding down women is a crucial, indispensable part of the proletariat's arising and carrying out its revolutionary struggle to win complete emancipation. We must find the ways to give even more powerful expression to the slogan: Break the chains! Unleash the fury of women as a mighty force for revolution!

This question is not only of great importance among our social base—it is a major dividing line and a major fault line in society as a whole—and it is one that is strategically very favorable for the proletariat. Only proletarian revolution represents the road to the real and complete emancipation of women, and this will become all the more clear as the ruling class intensifies its drive to tighten the shackles on women and the struggle around this continues to sharpen.

And right now, at the same time as we devote great attention and effort to this question and the struggles that erupt around it throughout society, it is important to seize on every favorable factor to make breakthroughs on this among our social base. And, again, it may be the case that among the youth (perhaps particularly the "younger" youth, as I have referred to them here) there may be particular opportunities to make such breakthroughs, which must be seized on, popularized, and spread more broadly. It is important for people involved in the youth work directly, and those leading it, to be closely following, studying, and deepening their awareness of various trends among the youth—on the woman question and on other important questions as well—learning from the masses of youth and what is taking place among them, in order to make such breakthroughs in practice.

It is important for us to put further emphasis on the youth group and the youth more generally, especially their contribution to mounting a powerful counteroffensive against the reactionary offensive of the ruling class, and particularly its racist offensive—putting the racists, the racist offensive, and the ruling class behind it on the defensive, hitting back at them in a very powerful way. This is

something we need to pay some concentrated attention to, not only in terms of the exposure we do, the agitation and propaganda we do, but also in various forms of mass struggle and in the way we bring forward masses of people and raise their combativity around this.

With this in mind there is one thing I wanted to raise, both in terms of national contradictions among the youth and also more generally in youth work. I have read both some reports and analysis we did and also some articles from bourgeois newspapers that were sent to me about some of the high schools and what's happening with them in Los Angeles in particular. These indicate that schools which were historically overwhelmingly Black schools in some of the central parts of L.A. have been becoming increasingly Latino, or becoming half Latino, half Black. Also, I noticed in a report that in one L.A. high school in particular, one of the youth we're working with was talking about what happened when that poster went up in his high school—the one that said, "What's the Difference Between English Only and Whites Only?" This youth commented that this poster had a big impact among Blacks in particular and helped in building some unity between Blacks and Latinos among the youth in the high school.

This specific question—this specific arena of L.A. high schools and the changes that are taking place there—is something the bourgeoisie is obviously paying attention to from their point of view of furthering divisions and antagonisms among the proletarian youth. And it is something we should be paying attention to from just the opposite standpoint. Here again, some things in the cultural arena, some of the ways in which the Latino and Black cultures do, especially among the youth, tend to merge and cross-fertilize and cross-influence each other, are a part of the picture. But more generally I think we have to be seizing on such situations where youth of different nationalities, especially in our social base, are being drawn, or even "pushed," together, as in some of these Los Angeles high schools.

This is a potentially very important favorable factor for us, a very good thing, even though in the short run the bourgeoisie is fostering antagonisms and playing on such antagonisms for all they're worth, and bringing forward all kinds of bourgeois and aspiring bourgeois forces to try to further the divisions. I think we have a great potential to do just the opposite and strengthen the youths' contribution

toward proletarian revolution. So we ought to pay some particular attention to things like these L.A. high schools. Situations like this may exist not only in L.A.—that's a particular situation which deserves particular attention—but more generally we have to dig into these kinds of scenes to see if some of that potential can't be realized.

(I just wanted to make a note here that the question of student work—by this I mean particularly work among college students and youth and students who are not in the proletariat—is also very important, particularly at certain points in the school year. There is a certain tempo to the school year and certain high points as well as ebbs. Over the past couple of years, from what I can tell, there seems to be more spontaneous struggle and there seems to be more and more basis for revolutionary work among these students, and it is important that we pay attention to that. But work among these students is not the main thing I wanted to focus on in these remarks in terms of youth work.)

"What's Wrong with White People?"

Moving on to another point, a question I wanted to investigate again—I raised it in a previous letter I wrote as something to investigate—is the whole question of what we could call white "real proletarians," as opposed to higher-paid more stably employed white workers. (Included among white "real proletarians" are "city whites," white proletarians who do not live in the suburbs and have never made it to that stratum but basically have been stuck in the cities and are part of the proletariat in that way too. This is a phenomenon that needs more investigation, as does the question of white "real proletarians" more generally.) How to materialize and concretize unity between these whites and other proletarians, specifically Blacks and other oppressed peoples inside the cities? I raised previously in one of my letters the idea for a message addressed from some proletarian whites to the oppressed peoples—Black people and others within the proletariat—calling for class unity on a revolutionary basis and specifically on the basis of opposing racism, national oppression, and discrimination.

Obviously, this is a tricky question because you don't want white people speaking as *white people*. You want them speaking as *proletarians*. But there is a point to their speaking as white people who are speaking as proletarians: explicitly saying, "We're white people but that's not our identity, our identity is as proletarians and

we recognize the need to build the unity of our class on a revolutionary basis going up against all the rotten racism, national oppression, and discrimination that's a basic part of this system—yet another very important reason why the system has to be overthrown." *That* kind of unity is very important, even if it's only a small number of advanced white proletarians that can be drawn together to take a stand like that at the start. And we'd also have to bring forward a class-conscious response among the oppressed nationality proletarians, relying on the advanced among them. But I think this is something to at least think about and investigate, and certainly we cannot abandon or fail to give due attention to the strategic orientation of seeing and uniting the proletariat as a class of all nationalities and of building the solid core of the united front, the unity of the class-conscious proletariat with the struggle of the oppressed peoples against their oppression as peoples. It is very important that we persevere and find ways to make breakthroughs in this orientation.

I had actually played around with the idea of trying to write something with the provocative title, "What's Wrong with White People?" I had the first couple of lines and the last line written, but the reason I didn't write it (right now at least) is because it's something that would have to be done extremely well. It has to be extremely artistic, and as soon as it gets too baldly "political" in its analysis it's no good. I couldn't pull it off right now, and I don't know if I ever will be able to. I had this idea: I was going to write the title, "What's Wrong with White People," and then the first sentence: "What *is* wrong with white people?—that's a question that's asked by a lot of people, especially people who aren't white (and even some who are)." Then I was going to run down all the pulls the system has which make many white people take backward, even reactionary stands, but also run down how there is a real class contradiction in society. And the last line was going to be, "To return to the original question, what's wrong with white people? Answer: nothing that a good proletarian revolution couldn't cure." But I couldn't quite pull it off. I had the opening line, I had the ending, but the stuff in between started getting too "political" and it wasn't artistic enough, and if it isn't then it would sink and it would stink so I didn't do it.

This is a question a lot of people ask, and some of the answer I wanted to give to people is, first of all there are a

lot of white people out there who are far from reactionary—again, the whole thing about Refuse & Resist!, making it a living reality; and other social movements that do exist, doing revolutionary work among them to bring forward the advanced and to influence them in a revolutionary way. All this has a very important effect in helping the masses of the oppressed nationalities to see that there are a lot of white people with whom there is a basis of unity, or who are real or potential allies in a revolutionary struggle; that there are many white people who, minimally, find a lot of things about the system that they don't like, and some of them have come to the point of wanting to get rid of the whole system too. Included among these whites are masses of women outraged by the endless abuses suffered by women in this male-supremacist society as well as other crimes of this system.

That's on the one hand.

But let's get back to the problem of white people more generally. Speaking of the intermediate strata among them, including the many who are not absolutely hopeless, it's not just a question that there's something wrong with white people in the abstract. The point is, first of all, there's the whole position of U.S. imperialism in the world and the way people are given the spoils from that. But then within that there is class differentiation as well as differences between nationalities. Second, there's white supremacy built into the system, and even whites who are on the bottom still have that as something that puts them over Black people in important ways. And third, there are a lot of real, material ties that people get into that have to do with the nature and functioning of the system.

There are many whites who are poor and exploited—there are in fact more than a few white "real proletarians." But even among many of these whites who find themselves in conditions of poverty and misery and who see no prospects for "improving their lot" there is a marked tendency to get down *on themselves*, to blame themselves for their situation and simply to be very demoralized. Not that such sentiments cannot be found among Black people, for example, but at the same time among the Black masses there is a much more widespread and intense feeling that their miserable conditions are *not* their own fault, that someone else, their oppressors, have cast them into these conditions and are doing everything to keep them in these conditions. The fact that this sentiment is not as common

among poor white proletarians is, ironically, a product of white supremacy and racism to a significant degree: Being white, there is more of an inclination to believe that you can, or should be able to, "make it," and if you can't then it must be your own fault. Obviously, this is a pull away from class consciousness, and it is a class-conscious revolutionary understanding—including as a key part of that an understanding of and hatred for white supremacy and racism—that will lift people beyond such demoralization.

At the same time, there are in the U.S. many whites who have accumulated some money and property. And this has a concrete effect. For example, if you are able to make a little money and get a small business then you begin to develop the mentality that goes along with it. It's not just abstraction. You begin to worry about property taxes and the value of your property. Very powerful, conservative pulls are exerted on you. You've even seen it happen to people who were pretty good people in the '60s, for example. It's not just that they get a few things and they get stuffy and conservative—they also have real pulls on them. They are in debt, everything they have is tied up in property which is affected by everything that happens in society and the world, and the least little ripple can ruin them in many cases. And people who buy a house, they start worrying about mortgages and property taxes and the value of their property, and what's happening in the neighborhood. They become very narrow and petty and worry about whether the neighbors are keeping up their lawn. They worry what happens when you buy your house and then you want to resell it and move somewhere else. And what are you going to do when you retire, and how are you going to get your kids through college, and so on.

Once you see all this you can see, on the one hand, what's wrong with white people and even what's wrong with Black people who get to the point of being able to get caught up in this, begin to get really influenced by it, even though they are never allowed to participate equally. Even they begin to get influenced by a lot of this stuff and have these pulls on them. And you can also see that it takes something very powerful to rupture people out of this. On the other hand, we've seen through the '60s and we'll see again that powerful things can and do develop that do rupture people out of this in a massive way.

These are important points for people to understand, especially among the proletariat and the oppressed

nationalities particularly. But I had difficulty putting it all together in one little sharp, artistic piece. Yet I do think it's important that in different ways we bring this understanding to people, including what's the substance of the punch line. In other words, why can you say—without it being a leap into fantasy, or a leap from nowhere to nowhere—"Well, nothing is wrong with white people that a good proletarian revolution couldn't cure." There are real backward pulls, but there are also material reasons why, with a real rupturing of some things, masses of people—including masses of white people—could be ruptured out of that. This shows you, from yet another angle, why you have to have a revolutionary movement and specifically a revolutionary movement that's based among people who aren't caught up in all those "ties that bind"—who frankly are not *allowed* to be caught up in all that. It has to be based most solidly among people who have been kept out of all that and therefore, to return to the line from the comedian George Carlin: Because they have the least, they are freer to be free. The people who have more aren't so free to be free. And that's why those with nothing are the ones who can lead the kind of all-the-way struggle that can rupture a lot of those other people out of the bind they're in and win them to revolution.

At the same time there are a lot of things going on in society that are already pulling people in that direction. And, here again, the youth are very important. While there are a lot of bad trends among the youth, particularly the white youth, there are also some good ones. And it's important that people see this and understand it, both in its contradictory character and also in terms of the material things that underlie all this. As Lenin said, it is crucial that the masses begin to get a materialist analysis and a materialist estimate of what's going on with different strata in society in all their different expressions. And this doesn't have to be dry and boring. It can be very concrete and living. We have to bring this home to people.

Again, I had wanted to do this in the form of a snappy, provocative little article with the title "What's Wrong with White People?" I had wanted to make that the form—an "artistic" vehicle—for making these points. I couldn't quite get it together for that, the way I really wanted to. But maybe this can stand in its place—giving some flavor of such an artistic presentation and, most importantly, speaking to the very important questions that are involved and

are on the minds of many people, particularly many people who know that something is very wrong with the whole system and want to see other people getting, and acting upon, that understanding.

United Front, Proletarian Leadership

More generally, what this is all part of is that we have to persevere in and make further breakthroughs on this question of uniting the proletariat as a class of all nationalities, particularly its most advanced section, and building that solid core: the struggle of the class-conscious proletariat together with the struggle of the oppressed peoples in the battle against their oppression as peoples.

More broadly, still in terms of the overall picture and overall strategy, there's the whole question of the united front under proletarian leadership as the basic strategic orientation for how to overthrow the present system and recast society in a revolutionary way. I was trying to think in a kind of provocative way, a sharp way, about this basic point that the revolution in imperialist countries will take the form of a civil war between two sections of the people and will not simply be 95 percent of the people going up against the government. There are people broader than just the ruling class who are going to fall out on the wrong side; and while strategically we have to unite all who can be united, on the other hand the form of the struggle, when it comes down to the struggle for power, is going to be a civil war between two sections of the people. Then I was thinking, well maybe we can already see some of the fault lines of that, or some of the battle lines of that. Maybe we can see it in the Howard Beaches, maybe we can see it in the Simpson-Rodino bill, maybe we can see it in the whole battle shaping up around abortion — right there we can see at least three of the kinds of battle lines in which this civil war between two sections of the people is going to fall out.

We can add in things like Central America and the Persian Gulf and the opposition to what the imperialist ruling class is doing and has to do in those places. And further, there is the whole thing around AIDS and the whole question, as it's been termed, about "privacy" — that is, the government clamping down and reaching more directly and tightly into people's very lives. If we see the battle developing in resistance to that, as well as all these other things, I think we begin to see that the lineup is not necessarily so unfavorable at all. It certainly would be very sharp,

it certainly would be forces lined up very powerfully on both sides. But if we see this question of the civil war between two sections of the people and we see it emerging out of these kinds of fault lines and battle lines, we can also see that there are definitely a lot of forces that will be pushed by objective events, and forced by these kinds of conflicts, into more and more direct and basic opposition to the system and its whole reactionary offensive. When we see the potential lineup, it's not that unfavorable in terms of a civil war between two sections of the people. This is a point that I think it's important to grasp, to do further thinking on, and also to put out there for people more broadly to grapple with and grasp in a deep way.

Next, I want to speak a little bit to this whole question of the strategic orientation of the "united front, but . . ." That is, the united front, but a united front *under proletarian leadership*. Not just any old united front. Here maybe I should give a little bit (and only a little bit) of a preview of the "open letter" that I'm still hoping to write. An "open letter" to Bruce Springsteen, Jessica Lange, et al., the "heartlanders" you might call them: these people who have sought increasingly to make their art sort of speak for the heartland, the dwellers of the heartland. In other words, populism in a certain form that it's taking now, especially in the arts.* What's involved here really is the question of what social base you rely on, what your program is, and on what basis you seek to unite people. In short, what's involved are some of the questions that are important in terms of grasping the relationship of unity and struggle in the united front and the necessity for proletarian leadership.

What I want to say to people caught up in this populism, etc., is that the point is not reaching out or refusing to reach out to these "heartland strata," if you want to put it that way. For example, I'm talking about the formerly better-paid workers in what, I guess, they're now calling the "Rust Belt" of the U.S. These are the traditional industrial centers, where a lot of workers were in a situation where in the past they could almost count on — almost like small farmers with a plot of land — seeing the jobs go from generation to generation in the steel mills or whatever.

*Bob Avakian did write this article, "The Heartland. . . of Babylonian Madness," which appeared in the Revolutionary Worker No. 434, Dec. 7, 1987.

Now they are seeing that situation fundamentally undermined, and there have been all the economic hardships that people have been subjected to, particularly over the last decade or two. There has been a real fall in their economic position and their earnings and all the hardship that's gone along with it. I'm also including in this general category small farmers and other similar "heartland" strata, as you could call them. The question is not whether to reach out or refuse to reach out to these "heartland strata." The question is where you plant your feet to reach out from. In other words, do you stand among these people and then see who you can reach out to from there, or do you stand with the people who are the basic proletariat, the most exploited people in the society who haven't ever shared in this American Dream and who see the world and the U.S. completely differently because of that? And planting your feet firmly there—and your head and your heart firmly there—then try to reach out to these "heartland" strata and even more broadly to other strata.

The question, in other words, is not *to whom* you should speak but, first and most fundamentally, *for whom* you speak. And, *on that basis*, to whom? I think this is a very important point. Yes, we have to speak to these strata. Yes, we have to seek to unite with them; yes, we have to understand even more deeply what moves them, how they see things, and what their feelings are very deeply, and so on. But we can't take up the stand of people whose spontaneous expression and whose position in society will—in and of itself, by itself, and left to itself—at most lead them to militant reformism and populism and, frankly, mixed in with that, some very wrong and bad ideas and tendencies.

So, again, looking at it from this standpoint, the point is: the united front, yes, *but* under proletarian leadership. Actually, I've spoken to this before somewhat. Reading over what I've written on this, I was struck by how important and relevant this is. I'm referring particularly to the article (in the *RW* series "More Reflections and Sketches") "The Best of Times, the Worst of Times." This article speaks very importantly to this whole experience of these strata. It approaches this off the Billy Joel song "Allentown." It quotes from that and then it quotes Malcolm X: We don't see any American Dream, all we've ever known is the American Nightmare, etc. Then it gets into the whole experience that people have gone through—the kind of people Billy Joel is speaking about in the "Allentown"

song—and it contrasts that with the experience of our basic social base, what we call the real proletariat, and other oppressed people who have always seen the American Nightmare. At the same time, that article showed what the basis for unity is, while stressing who has to lead who and what has to lead what.

It's really very striking. I finally got around to reading this book by Greil Marcus, *The Mystery Train*. I hadn't even realized, until people made me aware in various ways, that this book is somewhat influential in terms of the cultural sphere, specifically in terms of rock 'n roll criticism, etc. It's striking, what I call the sort of perverse love-hate relationship that a lot of these people have with America and with the way of life and system of America. These people are very sharply contradictory, and in the Greil Marcus book it even comes out in this perverse love-hate thing with Lyndon Johnson. It's sort of this artistic thing, but it's very perverse at the same time. On the one hand Marcus talks about Johnson's war crimes, but on the other hand he goes on and on about how earthy LBJ was—showing his scars, sitting in the bathroom when people come to visit him, taking a shit when foreign dignitaries come, this sort of bullshit—a lot of it mythology anyway. Doesn't that sort of get at it, what people like to idealize—this type of "earthy American character"?

We need to be aware of and be speaking to all this. It's wrong to write these people off and give up on them—either the artists I'm speaking of or the "heartland" strata they want to speak for. On the other hand, it just illustrates why we have to base ourselves among the people who don't have the basis for, and don't have, the love-hate relationship with this whole system and this whole way of life; who have a *hate* relationship with it, even if that has not yet assumed a conscious political expression.

This really gets into the whole Elvis Presley question, which I got into also in the "Reflections and Sketches" series, in the one on Phil Ochs. As far as I'm concerned, the fascination and the acceptance of a lot of after-the-fact mythology about what a tremendous influence Elvis Presley was really has to be gotten into and shredded. It has a lot to do with people clinging to white chauvinism, clinging to American chauvinism and a lot of things that people have to be helped—and jolted—to break loose from.

At the same time, this just emphasizes all the more why we have to rely on people who are *not* into white chauvin-

ism; who have no basis to be into white chauvinism; or who, on the basis of their fundamental class interests, have repudiated white chauvinism and American chauvinism or are powerfully drawn toward a line that repudiates those things. It helps to make very clear why we have to rely on the real proletariat — that's where our feet, our head, and our heart have to be, and from *that* basis we should and can reach out very, very broadly. But we'll keep our feet there. We won't fall all over ourselves and lose our grounding in the effort to build a broader unity but will remain firmly grounded in the real proletariat and on *that* basis be able to have the strength to unite broadly and keep things going forward in a revolutionary direction.

The Back Fence

Another point I'd like to make on this question of the united front is once again another application of the principle of not accepting the enemy's terms and confines for how things have to go or how the struggle is going to take place. It is another correct application, in political-strategic terms, of "We fight our way and they fight their way." Here's the point I'm driving at: When we look at the possibilities for revolution in the U.S., on the one hand it is very important to make a class analysis of the different forces and groups in U.S. society to determine which have the potential for being at the heart of the revolution, or for being won to the revolution, or at least being neutral toward and not opposing the revolution. It's very important to do that and have a sound strategic orientation based on such an analysis of forces within the U.S. But, at the same time, in considering the possibilities, the prospects, and the strategic orientation toward revolution in the U.S., it's very important that we not accept the borders and confines of what is now the U.S. We must always remember, as a point of basic orientation, that these were created and forged through blood and destruction and oppression, and there's certainly nothing whatsoever sacred about them.

There are a lot of forces, strategically important forces, who are outside (what is now) the U.S. but are favorable to proletarian revolution in the U.S. and could have a very real bearing on revolution in the U.S. I am referring particularly to the masses of people to the south of the U.S., in what the U.S. imperialists, with their arrogant imperialist chauvinism, like to refer to as their "backyard." So we say, in terms of their backyard, if they want to erect fences and

barriers in order to maintain tight control, we want to open the back door and knock down the back fence and invite a lot of other people to take part. In other words, especially if we think the conditions would be even more strategically favorable, then why not knock down the back fence and make it even more a festival of the oppressed and make the strategic alignment even more favorable?

Now this is a somewhat provocative way of reemphasizing the whole point of the influences back and forth between revolutions all throughout Central America and the revolutionary struggle in (what is now) the U.S.: the whole question of the mutual influence and the mutual support of revolutionary struggles sweeping all throughout Central America on the one hand — including Mexico and all the way down south — and on the other hand sweeping back up north, mutually interacting with and mutually supporting revolutionary struggle in the U.S. itself. So we say, "knock down the back fence," in terms of strategic orientation. They want to talk about it as their backyard, we say "knock down the back fence." They're frightened to death and want to clamp down on these unruly people coming into the backyard and the house. We want to invite them all in and make it even more strategically favorable, not only in terms of revolution in the U.S. but in terms of revolution all over — all over the Americas and, fundamentally, all over the world. This is another important application of "you fight your way, but we fight our way."

This is important to have as a point of basic orientation, and this is also another way of looking from different angles and bringing new light on the question of the back and forth, the two-way effect, of revolutions in the U.S. and revolutions south of the U.S. This is another way of reemphasizing the point that was made in *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?*, where in one section it addresses some different sets of "two possibilities." One of those "two possibilities" is that revolution begins, jumps off first, in Mexico and throughout Central America and then has a tremendous influence back up into the southern U.S. and all the way through the U.S., and that helps to develop the revolutionary struggle in the U.S. overall. Or, it could be the reverse. Most likely (as it says in *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?*) is that the revolutionary struggles in Mexico and Central America on the one hand and the U.S. on the other hand will be very closely bound together, with great impact and influence back and forth. Of course, in

the U.S. we must work to strengthen international support and unity with revolutionary struggle to the south, and I think the most favorable situation overall would be if revolutionary struggles in both places were developing, probably unevenly, but mutually reinforcing and mutually supporting each other to the greatest degree possible. Looking at it in grand strategic terms, we have to contribute to that to the greatest degree possible in our work in building toward revolution in the U.S., making political preparation now and, when the necessary conditions are there, carrying out the highest form of struggle on the basis of that preparation. So I say, "Knock down the back fence, and we'll fight our way and you fight your way."

III. Historical, International Perspective

This brings me to the final point: Returning to the historical and international perspective. Here I want to restate and reemphasize the basic strategic orientation set forth in *For a Harvest of Dragons*, the overall orientation for approaching the historical process of the transition to communism: making maximum gains in terms of seizing power, especially in those periods where the possibilities are heightened both on a world scale but also within particular countries; and, on the other hand, consolidating and preparing for further leaps and advances, in terms of seizing power and advancing the revolutionary movement, when you're in periods of relative ebb.

This orientation is both fundamentally correct and very important as a basic guideline. But at the same time we must keep in mind the all-important truth that periods of preparation, or ebb, in one country may be periods of revolutionary upsurge or even the seizure of power in other places, other countries. Now is not a period of ebb overall on a world scale. But even when on an overall level (that is, a world scale) the period can generally be characterized as one of ebb, it is very definitely wrong to make an absolute out of that and to see only the ebb and not the shoots of future revolutionary struggle that are springing up and even the revolutionary struggles that are being carried out. These struggles may be making great strides, maybe even seizing power in particular places—in particular countries, or perhaps parts of particular countries. It is very important to have the orientation that enables you

to recognize and to seize on and give maximum support to revolutionary struggles wherever they develop, even in periods when, overall on a world scale, things can be characterized as being in an ebb. And this is especially so with regard to the situations where the revolutionary struggle is in its highest form and is directly aiming for the seizure of power.

This takes me back to the formulation I referred to earlier from "Advancing the World Revolutionary Movement: Questions of Strategic Orientation." This is the question of combining Lenin's very crucial definition of internationalism—working for proletarian revolution in one's own country and supporting this and only this struggle and line in all other countries—combining this with the approach of looking at things on a world scale and identifying and giving special attention, effort, and focus to breakthroughs in areas where it may be (a) most advantageous or most possible, and (b) most decisive. Going further, we—that is, we the international proletariat, the international communist movement—can't have the strategic orientation of settling into a situation where we have socialist states, you might say, "living in the same world" with imperialist states, and where the orientation becomes for each socialist state one of increasingly putting the concerns of being an established state over and above the questions of advancing the world revolutionary movement.

As a matter of objective fact and as a matter of strategy, it is important to recognize the uneven development of the world revolution and the fact that power will be seized in particular places and not all at once over the whole world. Further, there are periods when there are more possibilities on a world scale for advancing the revolutionary struggle, and then there are periods when it's less possible, and you have to be able to maximize gains in the more favorable periods and to consolidate while preparing for future leaps when there's a temporary and relative ebb on a world scale. Even while all that's true, never should the orientation become, for the international proletariat and the international communist movement, an orientation of settling into a situation where a socialist state becomes in fact just another state in the world—a state that's temporarily got some socialist relations, to put it in kind of bald terms.

So here we get back to the kinds of problems that are mentioned, without any full solution being offered, in A

Horrible End, or An End to the Horror? I'm referring to problems in continuing the revolution under socialism and fighting capitalist restoration. Included is the problem of "going back to Yenan": the whole question of how on the one hand you rely on the youth in socialist society as a revolutionary force, but on the other hand there is a tendency among youth to turn revisionist and bourgeois, especially to the degree that a revisionist line holds sway within the socialist society. Another way this was put in *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?* was that the negation of revisionism is not necessarily and immediately communism but may be open bourgeois democracy. If you look, for example, at the revisionist countries, what a lot of the youth are drawn toward is more open bourgeois-democratic ideas and trends, as a sort of a negation and repudiation of the revisionism that's been passed off as Marxism. And the demoralization that takes place under revisionist rule doesn't lead immediately and directly, as a mass phenomenon, to the demand for real communism, but more so, as a mass phenomenon, to a demand for bourgeois democracy for real.

All these, again, are problems that need attention. They were posed in *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?* but there was not any real attempt there to give any kind of full and final answer to them. These are things that we in the international communist movement as a whole have to pay attention to, as well as our party in particular paying attention to them.

So, on the one hand, you have all those kinds of problems. But the other side, the positive side, is the point that I've also stressed and that we do have to keep firmly in mind: what proletarian revolutions and socialist states are good for after all. We should never lose sight of what they are good for. It is definitely true that in socialist society there are all these contradictions and problems. There is even the tendency for masses of people to become more conservative once their conditions are improved as a result of a revolution, along with the tendency for leading people to become conservative when they're in power and have all the requirements of running a state and are trying to deal with an imperialist encirclement, etc. While all that is very real, on the other hand we should never lose sight of the fact that as a result of seizing power and making transformations you do have real initiative and considerable freedom. Real advances are made and real freedom and

initiative is gained when the proletariat does rise up and, with its vanguard leadership, does actually seize power and gain control of the superstructure and carry out transformations in the economic base of society, the actual social relations among people. These are tremendously liberating things. And while we should not lose sight of the problems and therefore fall into revisionism in our orientation, we should also not lose sight of the tremendous advances and the advantages, the freedom and initiative that can be seized and must be seized.

But I think we do have to learn from the orientation that Mao was very firm on when people would seek advice from China on how to make revolution. Not only would he affirm the general principle of "don't copy us, one revolution can't copy another," but you also got the sense from Mao, and I think this is very important, that "just because we made a revolution and made some transformations doesn't mean that everything about this society is so revolutionary." In other words, to take what he was saying and put it in another light, there has been a tendency—an incorrect tendency, in my opinion—in the history of the international communist movement to assume that a socialist state is in all respects a world vanguard once it has been established.

Looking at it dialectically, on the one hand it would be wrong to negate the very real advances that a socialist revolution means and the way in which new breakthroughs are made and new things are brought into being that can only be brought into being on the basis of seizing and exercising political power. There is a powerful reality to that Lenin statement that without political power all is illusion—that's very real and very crucial. On the other hand, you can't assume that just because the proletariat has seized power, and there's revolutionary proletarian power in a particular place, everybody should follow in their wake in terms of making revolution elsewhere in the world. There are also a lot of contradictions and entanglements that are involved in being a socialist state in a largely imperialist world. This contradiction and the acute expressions it takes need to be profoundly understood. If we are going to move forward and build a more powerful international communist movement and move on to a fully developed International, these kinds of contradictions have to be on the table, out front and correctly dealt with. We have to be addressing them even now in moving toward that more fully developed International that we do need.

This point is difficult to express but it is also one that I think is tremendously important. In other words, it's not just the case that we have the task of upholding and defending the states where we have seized power and making further transformations there, while at the same time putting first and foremost the overall advance of the world revolutionary movement. That's a very important point of basic and strategic orientation. But it is necessary to understand that this contradiction is going to continue to pose itself very acutely. There is going to be a tendency for socialist states to be oriented more toward the necessities and requirements of existing and surviving in a hostile imperialist environment, and that is going to exert a very strong pull that is in conflict with the overall advance of the world revolutionary movement, and even with maintaining socialism in those states. You can't just assume that conflict is not going to be there and it's not going to be real and intense. Nor, on the other hand, can you say, "Oh, the hell with it! Socialist states aren't good for anything, why bother to have them and why bother to defend them?" Both those would be very, very wrong and work against what we have to do.

I believe the parties of our movement, as they come to power — which they will, here and there, and more and more in looking at the overall trend — have to have the orientation of really saying, as Mao said: Listen, we seized power, we're doing everything we can for the world revolution, but don't sit there and take orders from us; don't try to do everything the way we did or even the way we might tell you tomorrow to do it. You've got to go out and make revolution. That's what we had to do and that's what has to be done. And you've got to pull on us, pull our coat, as the saying goes, and struggle with us to get us to support your revolutionary efforts. Don't tie your tail onto us.

At the same time the people who have not yet seized power have to be very firm in their internationalism in the aspect of upholding, defending, and building support for the defense of the socialist states, and for the further revolutionization of those socialist states, once they've been established.

So, to sum up and to conclude on this point and give a particular expression, or twist, to the question of the "two possibilities" that was addressed in *A Horrible End, or an End to the Horror?*: In light of what I've been speaking to here, and specifically returning to the historical and inter-

national perspective, let's look at what has been referred to many times as the unique relationship or linkup between the U.S. on the one hand and on the other hand Mexico (and Central America) as part of the Third World. Let's think about this whole relationship — what has been referred to as a unique meeting of two vastly different worlds, the first world and the Third World, if you will — very unusual and very striking, and the contrast is very great. If you live two miles — even two feet — on one side of the border or the other, your world and your life and your conditions are vastly and dramatically different.

This kind of unique linkup is one that puts a particular light on this fundamental question of how to continue the revolution toward the goal of communism and handle the contradiction of socialist states existing in an imperialist world for some time. This linkup is one that is strategically very favorable for the international proletariat and offers a very unique and strategically favorable opportunity. To put it this way — to end up on a dream, in the spirit in which Lenin said that there's nothing wrong with dreaming if my dreams are in accord with reality and if I then do my part to help bring them into reality — in this spirit you could say that the best kind of situation that we could conceive of would be if power were seized more or less simultaneously in the U.S. and in good parts of Central America and Mexico. Imagine: real proletarian revolutions succeeding in seizing power in those places more or less at the same time. Then, not only would the revolutionaries in both situations be able to further develop their unity very concretely, but the whole kind of back-and-forth relationship would be kind of a new breakthrough for the international proletariat.

This would offer some special opportunities and maybe some special advantages, strategically speaking, in terms of combating the tendency toward revisionism within socialist states. You would have then a very real thing where the revolutionaries from the two sides of the "great divide" — the great oppressive division, of imperialism on the one side and Third World oppressed nations on the other — would be able to join their efforts very closely to figure out how to carry out a great revolutionary transformation fundamentally in unity and together.

This would be something that would be very good for the proletarians on both sides of that "great divide" — to help knock down that "great divide." In other words, to be

able to unleash the masses to take up, as practical tasks, things to be done to overcome the great gaps between what exists on the one side and the other of this previous "great divide" would be a very real challenge and a very real strategic advantage for the proletariat, politically and ideologically.

Of course, this itself would have to be understood and dealt with as only one part of the much larger and overall

more fundamental task of transforming the whole world. But I think, if you can dream a bit, you could dream of a situation like that. That would be a tremendous situation to have brought into being. Because of this unique situation that the imperialists created, it would offer unique opportunities strategically for the proletariat to turn that all around and make a new breakthrough on the path toward transforming the whole world.

Some Further Thoughts

Early 1988

I. Planning and Laissez-Faire

I want to start out with a point that I was thinking about when I was thinking back on "The Ten Major Relationships" by Mao. It's a point where Mao is illustrating the question of the relationship between centralization and decentralization and he uses the example (this is a talk during a long meeting) that after the meeting some of us will go for a walk and others of us will do other, different things. In other words, he's making a point that they're going to have a lot of centralization and all being together intensely in the meeting and then afterwards they're all going to go off and "do their own thing."

It struck me in thinking about this that it has larger implications for the future of society, as well as the more limited and immediate example of a meeting or any particular aspect of the relationship between centralization and decentralization. And it got me to thinking about the point that Mao made in the *Critique of Soviet Economics* on the dialectics of planning and laissez-faire where he says we shouldn't assume that there's only planning and not laissez-faire. There's plenty of laissez-faire, and it exists in dialectical relationship with planning.

Now in the *Critique* Mao is more describing an objective phenomenon. In other words, whether we want it to or not, whether we allow for it or not, there will be laissez-faire as well as planning, and we can't think that our planning doesn't have to take into account the fact that there will also be laissez-faire. But while on the one hand this is objective reality, an objective phenomenon, this raised in my mind the question: Is there a subjective aspect to this too? Or to put it another way: To what degree is this

desirable in the future, not only the immediate future of the transitional (socialist) society but in the longer term future society—communism—for which we're aiming; to what degree is it *desirable* that there is both laissez-faire and planning? Desirable, that is, that there be meetings and then people going off and (while not doing their own thing in the most individualistic sense) some taking a walk, some people doing painting, some people listening to music, etc., etc. I think, to a degree, it is desirable.

It seems to me that you can go too far with this. I've been recently reading a book which is having a lot of impact from what I understand. I've been reading reviews of it and from what I can gather it's having a lot of impact in academic circles but also in political circles within the U.S. It's a recent book by Paul Kennedy called *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers* in which he attempts to sketch exactly that phenomenon over the past several centuries—what we would recognize as the rise of capitalism to the present era. I've only started in this book, but in the beginning he makes a whole case, an argument, which is interesting. It's obviously exaggerated I think, and for the reason that this conforms to the viewpoint of the author and the whole viewpoint of everything he's upholding. But he tries to address the question: Why was it in Europe, in certain parts of Europe in particular, as opposed to something emerging out of the eastern empires or empires in Central Europe and so on, why was it in certain particular areas in Europe that you got the development of the modern powers and also basically why is it that capitalism underwent such a vigorous development there?

The basic answer he fixes on is that in those countries, in those parts of Europe where this did happen, for a number of different reasons there never was this very strong centralized—you might call it "monolithic"—state of a feudal character that basically imposed a *pax* but also stagnation upon these areas, in more or less a feudal mode. Rather what you had was a number of states, none of which was able to impose its will upon the whole area, all of which were in competition and conflict with each other, and all of which were marked by a great deal of ferment and disparity or unevenness. In other words, there was a lot of laissez-faire in these places and a lot of diversity. And because there was all this, out of this emerged these very vibrant and dynamic empires and a more vibrant and dynamic system; whereas if you looked back, say, five cen-

turies or a little bit more, and just looked at the relative strengths and weaknesses of different empires, you couldn't see that the ones in these areas of Europe were any more "advanced" or more poised for some kind of dynamic growth, not only internally but in the world arena, than the ones in the East and in other places.

So he's trying to analyze this and he gives a lot of emphasis to this point that exactly because there wasn't one unified system imposed, which then was able to sort of constrict and constrain any kind of new development—this is why you got the emergence of these empires and the really vigorous growth of capitalism in these areas. Now again, while for subjective reasons Kennedy is probably exaggerating these factors, nevertheless I think there is something to think about in this. In doing just that, in reading this over and trying to think about the larger implications and tripping out with it a bit, it got me thinking also more broadly about this question of unity and diversity and its more general application.

It also raised in my mind a side point, which is how the bourgeois democrats, including even the revisionists (in particular the Chinese revisionists), see an identity between feudalism and the dictatorship of the proletariat. They basically identify them as being essentially the same, particularly the dictatorship of the proletariat as it has been characterized by strong central leadership, a strong central leading group, a strong central leading figure, etc. If you remember back after the time of the coup in China there was all this stuff comparing Mao to a feudal tyrant—and not in a way in which he and his supporters had sometimes done it, in a favorable light, using certain analogies. After the coup it was done in a very negative and, more to the point, literal way. In other words, the Chinese revisionists actually saw the strong leadership and the whole dictatorship of the proletariat in the same light as feudal absolutism. It seems to me there's an interesting question there. Because there's not the pluralism—which is really what's being described by this guy Kennedy in his book and as we know it's one of the quintessential principles of bourgeois democracy—because there's not that sort of pluralism, the dictatorship of the proletariat looks to be the same as feudal absolutism, when seen from the bourgeois-democratic class viewpoint. And of course the fact that the real essence is in no way the same gets lost in the fact that in some superficial ways there are similarities

in how both feudalism and the dictatorship of the proletariat negate bourgeois democracy.

In other words, feudalism in its own way, and the dictatorship of the proletariat and the transition to the future in its own quite different way, both negate some fundamental principles of bourgeois democracy, including this whole question of how pluralism is viewed and upheld as the quintessential thing by the bourgeois democrats. This goes back to some points that we've touched on before, and given some emphasis to, about the need for struggle, for the critical spirit, for dissent and all these kinds of things, but also how this is fundamentally different from how the bourgeois democrats view it and how it would be handled in an ideal—let alone the *actual*—bourgeois society. But I think it is interesting and there is something to learn from examining how it is that both feudalism on the one hand and the dictatorship of the proletariat, with its strong central leading group and central leadership, etc., are viewed by bourgeois democrats. I don't think they just invent this—obviously they distort and embellish—but I think there are actually some ways in which the revisionists and the bourgeois democrats in general actually do see some things as similar because they are not able to see the essence of things and the fundamental differences.

II. A Special Kind of State

This brings me to the next point. It has raised in my mind some more thinking about the question of the dictatorship of the proletariat as a "special kind of state," as Lenin put it. Lenin made this fundamental point: "The more democratic the 'state' [and he even put "state" in quotes here] which consists of the armed workers, and which is 'no longer a state in the proper sense of the word,' the more rapidly *every form* of state begins to wither away" (*The State and Revolution*, cited in *Democracy: Can't We Do Better Than That?*, p. 257). The point here is that the abolition of classes can only come through the transition marked by the revolutionary dictatorship of the proletariat—this is a fundamental point first made by Marx—and it is necessary not only to exercise but to continually strengthen this dictatorship of the proletariat. But at the same time the more it is strengthened, (and here's the point I want to emphasize) the *more it should become*

"no longer a state in the proper sense of the word," the less it should be like all other forms of state, the more it should embody something radically different.

Now, as I've just indicated, Lenin pointed to this but it seems that, to a significant extent, Stalin forgot it and went away from it. On the other hand, Mao Tsetung revived it and carried it forward, and hence to exercise the dictatorship of the proletariat means to continue the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat. But this remains a difficult and pivotal problem. In *Conquer the World? The International Proletariat Must and Will*, I pointed to the fact that the actual experience of socialist states so far—socialist states existing as they have in a sea of imperialist encirclement—has shown that certain things anticipated by Lenin in *The State and Revolution* have not been possible to achieve yet. In particular, it has not been possible—principally because of imperialist encirclement—to do away with a standing army in socialist states and replace it with simply the armed masses, organized in militias and similar formations. Even in China before the coup, with the experience of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution and with the emphasis Mao and his followers placed on building up the popular militias, they had to recognize that it was not yet possible to do away with the standing army (the People's Liberation Army in China) or to reduce it to a secondary role while elevating these people's militias to a more important role than the army. But this does not negate the basic point that I am focusing on here: the particular nature of the dictatorship of the proletariat, the fundamental ways in which it is different from all other states, the fact that it serves the transition to communism—to the abolition of classes and, with them, the abolition of states—and that at every point in this transition, the more this state is strengthened, the more it should embody something radically different from the bourgeois dictatorship and all other forms of the state.

To make a digression with an important lesson in this regard: I recently received a letter from someone I would describe as a bourgeois radical intellectual who lambasted, in not-timid terms, my recent writings. I grappled with this and came to the conclusion that it was *not* a personal attack in essence. That what it reveals is the contempt (and in some ways it would not be too strong to say hatred) that people of this type feel for the line and leadership of the revolutionary proletariat and ultimately for the

dictatorship of the proletariat. And I think it is not accidental that in this letter the attack focuses on writings that represent a turn toward more popularization, beginning with *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?* And it is also hardly accidental that a strong reaction is provoked when much-cherished prejudices of such people are brought under fire – in particular bourgeois-democratic prejudices.

In other words, this person thinks things like *Conquer the World*... were fine because that raised all kinds of questions and threw up a lot of things for consideration and didn't come down with hard and firm verdicts about the whole history of things, but said people should think critically and investigate things. Now, obviously I, too, think that was fine and I think that's the correct verdict on it. But when we began to turn toward giving more emphasis to applying some of these things in practice and getting them out to the masses so that they could take them up more, and we started putting down more firmly some necessary and correct verdicts on some things not only in the history of the international communist movement but also in terms of current political problems, this really rankled this person. I think it is instructive because this person is representative of certain strata and in that sense it is a good thing that they felt provoked to write up a lengthy letter saying basically, "Please don't write any more books like this or any more writings like this generally."

I don't want to go on and on about this, but I do think there are some things to learn, some instructive things. For example, the thing that was the immediate provocation was the "Liberation Without Gods" series in the *Revolutionary Worker*. What came up was very interesting, the person really rankled at and took offense at statements such as that the *Bible* is contradicted by scientific and historical fact. Now as we know, in the history of the international communist movement there have been dogmatic uses of terms such as "scientific and historical fact" to beat down any kind of critical thinking and to impose some straitjacketing on thinking and to pose dogmato-reformist approaches to problems. But *really* what this person was talking about were such things as saying that the idea that the earth was created before all the stars and the rest of the universe is contradicted by scientific fact, which is about as controversial as saying that the idea that the earth is flat is contradicted by scientific fact. Furthermore, saying that

Nebuchadnezzar reigned at such and such time, or that such and such an event happened at x time and not when it was said to have happened in the *Bible*, etc.: To say that these things are contradicted by historical fact is hardly a dogmato imposition of straitjacketing on critical thinking. But it was almost merely the phrase "contradicted by scientific and historical fact," regardless of the actual content involved, that raised the horrible specter of totalitarianism, etc., (although it wasn't put exactly that way, but that was the spirit and essence of what was said).

Now when you step back from this and get over both being a little bit angry and a little bit amused at one and the same time, it seems to me that this is worth commenting on because it raises fundamental questions and fundamental difficulties that will arise in exercising the dictatorship of the proletariat and carrying forward the revolution under the dictatorship of the proletariat. In this light it is interesting to refer to the discussion of this problem and in particular the subjective *and* the objective factors involved with some of Stalin's errors in this regard, which is focused on in chapter 3 of *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?*, including the objective problem of "how to give 'air' to the intellectuals and encourage creativity, critical thinking, initiative, and the 'battle of opinions' while at the same time leading the intellectuals – when they by and large do *not* readily accept such leadership or embrace the Marxist outlook and method" (p. 183).

The point is that they do not embrace such leadership by and large and spontaneously, even when the methods are correct and even when there is a real effort to apply the principles of giving air to breathe, encouraging, stimulating, and upholding initiative and critical thinking, the battle of opinions, etc. Even when all this is more or less correctly handled – not perfectly, but handled according to fundamentally correct principles – spontaneously these intellectuals, or large numbers of them, do *not* readily accept such leadership. This is going to be a long-term problem. It is easy – when you have power – to simply suppress such people. It is easy in the short run, that is. But it is much more difficult to apply the correct approach as summarized in the statement from *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?* just cited. And this is linked to the larger problem of how to "live with" *and transform* the petty bourgeoisie through the course of the transition to the final goal, as Lenin spoke to in the beginning of *Left-Wing Com-*

munism, *An Infantile Disorder*. The problem is how to live with and transform and remodel these strata, not just the intellectuals but the petty bourgeoisie more broadly.

What approach you take toward such problems and whether you persevere in the correct approach, even in the face of vacillation and provocation from those in these intermediate strata, will be fundamentally determined by whether or not you are keeping your eye on the prize: the long-term and fundamental goal of communism worldwide.

III. What You Take into It

Why focus on this now? Because of the times and the fact that the possibility may emerge—the possibility of actually going over to the highest form of struggle. When this does become the order of the day it requires really plunging into it. As Mao Tsetung stressed, it has its own laws and, while overall guided by politics, as an extension of politics, it is an extension of politics by other means. So the point I'm trying to make is that we are actually approaching one of those times when it may even be possible as well as necessary to actually plunge in and take this up. And experience has shown that when you do this the fact that it has its own laws and its own dynamic has a concrete effect. You do get caught up in the dialectics and the dynamic of it, and what you take into it has a lot to do with what you bring out of it. Now this is not an automatic thing because what you do all during it has even more to do with what you bring out of it, but there's a very important relationship between what you take into this highest form of struggle and what you come out of it with. It is precisely because I see us standing, perhaps, on the threshold of actually being able to launch this form of struggle in the period ahead, and certainly because we are on the threshold of great days, momentous events, that it is very important to step back and look at the larger picture and some of the deep-rooted questions and fundamental principles that are going to be involved if we're going to try to come out of this in the way that we need to.

To put it another way, as I've said before, I want to focus attention on this point because in plunging in, one must not "get lost" and become so immersed in this form of struggle that the fundamental principles and goals are forgotten and are lost. This, then, takes me to that oft-cited point

from *For a Harvest of Dragons*, the point where it says, "It will come to this: we will have to face [the enemy] in the trenches and defeat him amidst terrible destruction," and the whole point that is then elaborated about in fighting the enemy not becoming like the enemy; how this is one of the sometimes little noticed ways in which the enemy extracts revenge from the revolutionaries, and that we have to maintain our materialism and our dialectics, ending with maintaining "our solemn sense of purpose and our sense of humor" (p. 152).

In particular it is important to raise this because of the contradiction—another difficult and crucial dialectic—referred to in *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?*, that is, having and building a strong party base among the proletariat and on that basis being able to unleash—and lead—the "brave elements" and similar forces, many of whom will be youth from among the most oppressed strata. And all of this also has to do with questions of basic orientation.

IV. Who Are the Criminals?

There is a point from Peter Tosh that's very much related to all this, which is his line, "Everybody's talking about crime; tell me, who are the criminals?" This involves a fundamental question of outlook and stand, a fundamental dividing line. Specifically I'm referring to the situation of the oppressed masses, particularly Black people and other oppressed nationalities and immigrants, and more particularly the youth among them. This is a phenomenon we've talked about before, the whole *Escape from New York* phenomenon. You can cite statistics and paint scenarios, but basically they come down to the reality of the whole life, the prospects of jail or death (particularly for male Black youth); and for women in particular the welfare situation, being presented the prospect of having a baby as a teenager as the only way to have any worth and then on the other hand having the state come down on you in relation to all this. This situation includes even the way in which things like the AIDS epidemic hit these strata the hardest. Suddenly it is seeping out that this is not a phenomenon that is going to end up devastating mainly white male homosexuals—which would be horrendous enough even if it were—but that it is going to devastate the

oppressed masses once again; they are the ones that are going to be hit the hardest. And in describing this situation we can't leave out the imperialists' cynical and murderous calculations about these people (especially the people in the ghettos and barrios in the central urban cores) as expendable quantities in a nuclear exchange.

So again, this raises the question: All this talk about crime; everybody's talking about crime, crime, crime, tell me who are the criminals? It seems to me this is a very profound point of orientation and poses a very profound dividing line. Because if you do not see and fail to point the finger first and fundamentally at the system as criminal, then you're never going to be able to deal correctly with some very intense and complex contradictions.

In other words, how do we see, what stand do we take toward, the fact that broadly among the youth among the oppressed in particular, there is a sentiment of being unafraid of anything—unafraid of jail, even of death. What stand do we take toward the fact that broadly among the youth and among the oppressed more generally, there's this orientation? Do we focus only or mainly on how this is expressed spontaneously right now, and particularly on the negative expressions and forces that are fostered by this whole situation and, at the same time, are consciously fostered by the ruling class: the gangs, the crime, the drugs, etc.? Do we say those are the problems, those are the things that have to be clamped down on and stamped out? Or do we see who are the real criminals?

And here I'm reminded of another song, Melle Mel's rap tune "Hustler's Convention," and in particular its conclusion where he raps about "the real hustlers steal billions from the unsuspecting millions who are programmed to think they can win, ha, ha, ha, ha." And I think this takes in everybody from Jesse Jackson to this school principal guy Clark in New Jersey and all these other people—the James Brown line, "without an education you might as well be dead." I wrote recently in a letter, if you were being honest, you'd have to do a sequel that said, "with an education you might as well be dead, too." That's an objective reality. There are numerous statistics you can point to, to show that with a high school, even a college education the situation of the masses of Black people is not going to be fundamentally changed as long as we leave the system intact. As I pointed out in that "City Game" article, to look at the meat grinder and focus on the ways in which a few people

make it through intact, "make it" in the system, rather than focusing on how the system grinds up the masses, is a perversion at best.

So how do we see the *potential* of this anger, this lack of fear? This is the question. How do we view this? What stand do we take to it and what possibilities do we see in it? Strategically speaking are we afraid of this, or do we see that there is a tremendous revolutionary force latent here (as Mao Tsetung pointed out in his statement at the time of the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.) and that we can and must lead in transforming this into its full revolutionary power? Who else will? Who else can? And if we're not about doing this, then what *are* we about?

Here the question poses itself for real, as I alluded to in "Some Thoughts": Who's bad? *We're* bad. You haven't talked about bad until you've talked about really taking *them* on. And you know who I mean by "them." Taking them on for real and for the whole thing. And that's what we're all about.

In relation to this, I was thinking back to something that struck me at the time that I read it, it made a big impression on me. In Sebastian Haffner's book *Failure of a Revolution*, about the German experience at the end of World War 1, there is the following: "The crews of several large ships...opted for mutiny. Assuredly not from cowardice—*mutiny in time of war requires more personal courage than battle*. . . . In one town after the other thousands of them not only risked their lives but ventured the leap into the unknown, untried, incalculable which takes more courage than merely putting one's life at risk—*revolutionary, not merely soldierly courage*" (pp. 54, 60, emphasis added). And that last phrase in particular I want to repeat, "*revolutionary, not merely soldierly courage*." In other words there's a leap involved, even if you're one of these youth that I've been referring to who is unafraid of death, unafraid of jail, who basically takes the stand toward the system that there's nothing you can do to me that I'm afraid of. Even to go from that stand to one of actually undertaking a revolutionary struggle involves a further leap, it involves a leap that is exactly described by the difference between revolutionary and soldierly courage.

V. More on the "Three Needs"

This brings me to the last point: More on the three, or at least two of the three, "needs," or "what-do-we-needs." These are the three things, besides the emergence of the necessary objective conditions, that I spoke of as necessary to make a Beginning in "Some Thoughts." To summarize them, they are: (1) A movement, a *revolutionary* movement, a politicized, radicalized atmosphere among our social base and in society generally; (2) A strong party organization and a solid organized base of support for the party, especially among the most bedrock solid social base; and (3) Leaps in forging the multinational unity of the proletariat, its unity on a revolutionary basis, and leaps in forging that solid core of the broader united front, a united front under proletarian leadership.

I've touched on much of this already in the points I've made so far in this presentation, but in bringing this to its conclusion I want to go into some of these points a little bit further, particularly points 1 and 2.

With regard to the first point, it is crucial that the question of a revolutionary movement, a politicized, radicalized atmosphere, etc., not be viewed in stereotyped, dogmatic terms, serving reform instead of revolution. To cite a dramatic example, what is happening nowadays in Palestine or what has gone on in South Africa in the last several years—that is very political. Fighting back against the oppressors is *very political*. It is essential to what politics, in particular revolutionary politics, is all about. We must not think or act as if politics is only or even essentially ideas and theories, or slogans, divorced from the masses taking them up in action. All of these things—theories, ideas, political programs, slogans, etc.—are extremely important. But at the same time, we must not fall into thinking that these, especially in and of themselves, constitute the essence of politics, in particular revolutionary politics. As Mao Tsetung said, we must not be superstitious, we must not be bound by convention and stereotypes. The revolutionary movement we're talking about must not be made into a thing unto itself and thus become something posed against moving toward and then taking up the highest form of struggle. The point of this first of the "three needs" is precisely viewing things from the perspective of how to advance to the point where—through the combination of objective and subjective fac-

tors—that highest form is possible and can be unleashed.

I tried to get into this a little bit in "Some Thoughts" in reviewing some key aspects of the experience of the '60s and making the point about what were some of the underlying objective factors that gave rise to the particular forms of struggle and even some of the ideological as well as political expressions of the times that characterized much of the movement, even the most advanced aspects of the movement, in the '60s. As I pointed out, we must not expect to see all of those things repeated, especially not in exactly the same form, and think that all that must go on before it is possible to make the leap to carrying out the highest form. And again, this is another way of making the point that, as Mao Tsetung said, Lenin wasn't bound by superstition, he wasn't bound by convention, and we shouldn't be bound by superstition or convention or looking for ready-made models or recipes. In fact, as I think we've pointed out in other places, this is the most important understanding of not falling into "fashionable means." In other words, it is important to understand that falling into "fashionable means" can lead us to look for stereotypes, and in the lack of finding them, or in looking for the wrong kind of models, we can actually pose what we're doing against the need to go over to the highest form when in fact the objective conditions may be emerging that, with the correct work, would make that possible.

The conclusion that I drew in "Some Thoughts" about this was that the lesson is that, particularly looking at our most rock solid social base and at the same time looking to some of the more volatile, unafraid-to-die elements—or brave elements—among the oppressed masses, we have to see how the changed situation, in fact the heightened and intensified objective contradictions that mark this general period as compared to the '60s, pose the question more acutely of *how* to give expression to the highest form of struggle. To put it another, perhaps better, way, they pose the question of how to lead people in tempo with the development of the objective situation in going over to the highest form when the situation ripens, rather than thinking we have to go through a, b, c, d, e, stereotyped political forms of struggle before we can reach that point.

Now, again, just to make clear, I'm not saying that political struggle is unimportant or that there won't be a need for political struggle in moving in tempo with the objective situation toward that higher form. But I am em-

phasizing here that we're going to have to struggle all the way through against a tendency to throw up various forms of political struggle and activity—particularly those which are most familiar and perhaps most comfortable to other strata than our social base—to pose these as obstacles to the actual going over to the highest form at the right time and to think that these are necessary paths which have to be thoroughly traversed, thoroughly trod down to the very end, before it could even be conceivable to think of going over to the highest form—which then would make them obstacles and not necessary roads to the objective, detours away from it, and dead ends making the highest form of struggle impossible.

Moving on, then, the point I want to make with regard to the party itself and to party building, especially among the rock solid social base, is really to reemphasize what I spoke to earlier in this presentation. It is important to stress the importance of building the party's foundation among this social base, both for basic strategic reasons and more particularly with that dynamic contradiction in mind—that is, unleashing *and leading* all positive factors, specifically for the highest form, being able to utilize all such positive factors, including in particular the "brave elements," to be able to actually make a beginning and then to carry forward and carry through this struggle.

This takes me to the question of "first-stringism" vs. the concept of "using the masses," in particular the masses of the oppressed nationalities, as cannon fodder. This is a point raised in a report I recently read. It is also a point that more generally comes up, and even if and even when it is not explicitly brought up, it's there. It comes up particularly given the history and composition of our party and in relation to the masses who are going to be the most solid bedrock basis of doing the whole deal.

In other words, to elaborate briefly on that, the question comes up, "Well, you people have worked out all the political lines, you have all the theories, you have all the organization, you have your organization all together, and then you're going to use the oppressed masses, particularly the oppressed nationalities, because they are in a desperate situation, and because they are less afraid to fight, because they are willing to go out and risk things; and you are going to ride them to power. You have all the organized setup that you will then use to impose yourself as a new ruling class and let them be once again cannon fod-

der for your revolution. While they fight and die, you will assume the positions of leadership and then of power if it's successful." And I think on the one hand this is obviously wrong. It conforms neither to what is our actual line nor to our actual work in practice. But I think it is a real concern that's going to come up spontaneously—which includes through the propaganda and other means of miseducation from the other side. At the same time, it is something that we have to be taking into account and understanding more deeply ourselves. That is, we *could* fall into this if we didn't persevere and deepen our understanding of the correct line and correct forms of political activity, and if we had a vision, or fell spontaneously into an orientation, of looking toward further developments and toward the future transition to the higher form as simply "filling out the base" and in fact making that base be the actual fighting forces of the army, while those that are already involved and have more development become the leaders and commanders.

I think that moving against this involves, on the one hand, training and developing people from among the basic masses to become leaders of the party itself—this is an important ongoing task. And, on the other hand, it involves struggling even now so that the present correct and necessary organizational division of labor in the party does not become a political and ideological basis for social-democratic tendencies among, for example, those whose work is more public and open. The fundamental principle is that the whole party, with and through its necessary division of labor, is vigorously applying itself at every stage in carrying out its central task: create public opinion, seize power.

I won't go further into that now, but I think there's some things to think about and thrash through on that.

So, moving toward a conclusion, on the one hand what is involved are real ruptures, particularly with the question of party building and building it more solidly among the rock solid social base. But on the other hand, this rupture, as we've said, is not a leap from nothing. It is a leap from and a leap made possible by the political and ideological and organizational foundation we have and the steps we have already made in applying this in practice. Again, viewed strategically, the question is not whether there will be resistance, even uprising: The signs that there will be an increase, an upsurge of this, are everywhere and are inten-

sifying. The question is precisely preparing the ground, preparing ourselves and the masses, and specifically making the leaps and ruptures that must be made now to be ready for the time when in one sense, as Lenin put it, the masses come to the assistance of the revolutionaries; and at the same time, in the other aspect, *masses come to the revolutionaries demanding revolutionary solutions*. Again this raises the point that we very correctly stressed that this party is *different*, for all the reasons that it is different — which we have summarized elsewhere and I won't repeat here. The point is, however, that we have to carry

through on this.

In conclusion, what did Mao Tsetung characterize as most essential about Lenin? It wasn't his political acumen or strategic and tactical sense, nor even his important theoretical developments and contributions in terms of the revolutionary science. What Mao focused on and identified as the essence is that Lenin gave his heart to the masses, to the oppressed. It seems to me that this is fundamental as a point of orientation, and it takes on all the greater importance given what time it is and what will be demanded.

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